The Accommodation of Diversity: Liberal Quakerism and Nontheism

by

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with how Liberal Quakers accommodate a diversity of belief within their group. The project principally investigates the emergence of Quaker nontheism and the subsequent internal responses constructed as attempts to resolve the theist–nontheist divide. The thesis's central contribution is in providing a thickened account of Liberal Quaker discursive landscape – i.e. one focused on the details of internal manifestations of emerging views and tensions. This is achieved via an engagement with sociological theories of 'late modernity' alongside previous work in Quaker Studies to build upon the understanding of Liberal Quaker dynamics. The thesis particularly highlights the prevalence of reflexivity within Quaker thought. Additionally, philosophical tools are developed primarily via an engagement with 'postmodernist' thinkers. The thesis argues that these 'postmodernists' respond to similar challenges to those faced by the Liberal Quakers. Consequently, the thesis demonstrates that developments in these 'postmodernist' projects provide comparative resources for illuminating emerging Quaker views. Accordingly, the thesis delineates Quaker responses as broadly following two streams: reflexive-structural and alteristic responses, and considers them with regard to developing expressions of Quaker identity/theology/ 'orthodoxy'. The thesis has general implications concerning the changing shape of educated, liberal religious groups within a radically modern societal context.

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Contents

Introduction

(0.1) Liberal Quaker Diversity and Nontheism

This thesis examines some emerging views amongst Liberal Quakers: views that are emerging as part of and in response to the diversity of belief and points of (a)theological tension that exist within the group. The thesis has a particular interest in the current internal issue of theism–nontheism. The focus of the thesis is primarily on Liberal Quakers in Britain (Britain Yearly Meeting [BYM], also referred to as the Religious Society of Friends in Britain), but the project also draws data from American Liberal Quakers who are engaging with comparable issues and internal dynamics.

The present state of the theological culture of Liberal Quakers in Britain has been identified in the academic literature as pluralistic, permissive, hyper-liberal and post-Christian (Dandelion, 2008a:22; Dandelion and Collins, 2008:7). The development of these hyper-liberal features has roots in some of the key tenets of early Quakerism (i.e. that it was creedless and focused on religious experience), but it became exacerbated with the inception of the Liberal form of Quakerism in the late 19th to early 20th century (Dandelion, 2005:67).

In the 2013 British Quaker Survey, 36.5% of British Quakers self-identified as Christian, as compared to 46% in 2003 and 52% in 1990 (Hampton, 2014:36). Other members of the

Society variously identify as Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, or Pagan, along with some who simply settle for the label 'Quaker' with no further qualifiers (Boulton, 2006; Dandelion and Collins, 2008; Huber, 2014; Vincett, 2009). This continuing shift away from Quakerism's uniformly Christian origins is what led Dandelion to label the group as 'post-Christian' (Dandelion, 2008a:25).

This theological culture has currently produced an internal debate over the question of nontheism and whether or not theistic belief is essential to being a Quaker (Anderson, 2012; Boulton, 2006, 2012; Daniels et al., 2018:63; Macy, 2012). The 2013 Survey also saw 14.3% of respondents reporting having no belief in God, a rise from 7% in 2003, whilst the proportion of those answering that they did dropped from 72% in 2003 to 57% in 2013 (Hampton, 2014:7-43). Furthermore, there are other signs of the increased visibility of nontheism within the movement: 2011 saw the establishment of the Nontheist Friends Network UK (NFN UK),[1] which was accepted as a listed informal group (Quaker Recognised Body)[2] by Britain Yearly Meeting (Boulton, 2012:7, 2016:5,), suggesting some tentative recognition of nontheism's legitimacy within Quakerism on an institutional level.

[1] In her analysis of the 2013 survey, Jennifer Hampton categorises around 18% of survey respondents into what she terms the 'non-theist class', although she makes it clear this is not necessarily the same type of nontheism as the NFN UK (2014:28-29). Nevertheless, the survey still serves as evidence of the rising levels of nontheism within the group. Furthermore, in the conclusion to her analysis Hampton suggests that the potential for this 'non-theist class' to continue to grow presents a danger to the coherence of the Liberal Quaker identity (2014:43).

[2] Listed informal groups or Quaker Recognised Bodies are attached to but not directly under the organisational mandate of Britain Yearly Meeting. A name change from listed informal groups to Quaker Recognised Bodies took place in 2015. However, since this was after NFN UK achieved the status and the former term appears extensively in literature this thesis uses the terms together ('Quakers in Britain: Quaker Groups,' n.d.).

The pluralising, shifting and turbulent character of Liberal Quaker development with respect to individual/popular level belief has particular significance for the group. Within Liberal British Quakerism, changes and developments on this popular level have a direct influence on how the 'theology' and/or identity of the group is presented on an institutional level, above all in the form of their *Book of Discipline*.

(0.2) The Book of Discipline: Liberal Quaker 'Orthodoxy' and Neo-orthodoxies

The *Book of Discipline* is functionally the closest entity Liberal Quakerism has to an 'authoritative text' (Grant, 2014:29). Significantly, the text is revised approximately every generation to better reflect the popular beliefs held within the group (2014:28). It was first issued in 1738 (*Quaker Faith and Practice* [in citations hereafter *QF&P*] 2013:12). The latest revision was carried out in 1994, in response to requests in 1985 coming from a popular level, i.e. 'not from the centre but from local meetings and individual Friends, as well as committees' (*QF&P* 2013:14). This resulted in the tenth and current revision of the *Book of Discipline*, which was given the full title *Quaker Faith and Practice: The Book of Christian Discipline of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain* (2013 [1995]). Hereafter the thesis will use the abbreviated title the *Book of Discipline* for past, current and forthcoming revisions, differentiating between them in the text with reference to the date of revision.

In its current form the book incorporates a diversity of theological positions and viewpoints, with an anthological format where quotations and extracts are taken from a variety of

Quaker writings. These extracts are viewed as amenable to the Quaker movement– in the sense of being legitimate expressions of a Liberal Quaker outlook – on the institutional level. The extracts chosen for inclusion are not, however, framed as prescribed doctrine; prescribed doctrine may be viewed as anathema given the typical Liberal Quaker aversion to doctrinal creeds in the light of their commitment to the primacy of religious experience. To an extent the text may therefore be taken as reflective of the pluralism of belief and permissiveness which exists within the group. However, this does not mean that the text does not offer points and/or formulations that seek to bracket the diversity of belief within the group – lending Liberal Quakers a sense of a coherent identity/theology or orthodoxy – as Dandelion relates:

> the book of discipline is the closest approximation to the corporate view of the theology of the yearly meeting at the time it is accepted … it is valid to claim that the latest book of discipline can be used as a benchmark for the orthodoxy of the period during which it is in use. In these terms, the current book of discipline can be taken as the most accurate measure of present day orthodoxy. (1996:20)

The particular Quaker practice of revising the text has significant implications for the nature of this 'orthodoxy'. Dandelion delineates this by making a distinction between 'institutional religion', which is presented on an organisational level and represents 'orthodoxy' in canonical texts, especially the *Book of Discipline*, and 'popular religion', a term he employs to refer to individuals' personal interpretations of the institutional orthodoxy (1996:21). He suggests that once an orthodox position is presented on an institutional level (in the *Book of Discipline*), individuals interpret it in a variety of ways and thus a diversity of heterodox positions are developed. Some heterodox positions are then constructed into neo-orthodoxies, which are presented as potential candidates for uptake in the next revision of the *Book of Discipline* as new orthodoxy (1996:22-23) – the term 'candidates' here being

intended to refer to the ideas and/or theological constructions which may be suggested as neo-orthodoxies rather than the individuals involved in their development.

This process by which Quaker's develop their 'orthodoxy' means that orthodoxy remains connected with beliefs held on a personal and/or popular level within the group. It is constructed and engaged with in a manner that makes it extremely fluid and subject to change. Whilst Dandelion may note the *Book of Discipline* as 'the most accurate measure of present day orthodoxy' (1996:20), it is clearly orthodoxy in a loose sense, liable to become outdated with reference to the personal and popular views held within the movement. Indeed, the process may be understood as a continuous cycle of challenging the old orthodoxy and constructing a new one.

It is in the context of this cyclical process of orthodoxies becoming outdated and then revised that theism–nontheism has recently come to the fore in internal group discussions of potential (a)theological dissonance. In 2015 British Liberal Quakers started considering a revision of their *Book of Discipline* on an organisational level. *Meeting for Sufferings*[3] carried out a consultation with Local and Area Meetings to discern whether a revision was appropriate before setting up a *Book of Discipline* Revision Preparation Group. The consultations identified theism–nontheism as a key point that Quakers thought needed resolution before the next revision could proceed (Boulton 2016:57). The Revision

[3] 'Meeting for Sufferings is the standing representative body entrusted with the care of the business of the Britain Yearly Meeting through the year… It decides the priorities and sets the direction of the Yearly Meeting … Meeting for Sufferings also plays a vital role in fostering communication throughout the Yearly Meeting and in reviewing and testing concerns referred to it by area meetings. It also gives guidance on policy issues referred to it by Britain Yearly Meeting's trustees.' ('Meeting for Sufferings,' n.d.)

Preparation Group responded by setting up a 'think tank' in February 2016 which resulted in the publication *God, Words and Us* (Rowlands, 2017). Liberal Quakers officially agreed to go ahead with a new revision of the *Book of Discipline* at Yearly Meeting (YM) in May 2018 ('Yearly Meeting 2018', 2018:Minute 31). Awareness of the forthcoming revision (both before and after it was formally agreed upon) has motivated Quakers to intensify explicit engagement with the theism–nontheism divide and their (a)theological diversity, discussing and reflecting upon it in workshops, think tanks, popular publications and blog posts.

These are the circumstances taken as a starting point for the investigative work and overall argument of this project. As previously indicated, the thesis seeks to understand the current process of revision, and the popular reflections and discussions, with reference to Dandelion's formulation of Liberal Quakers constructing candidate neo-orthodoxies ahead of new revisions, for possible uptake as new orthodoxy. Given the nascent state of these developments, the thesis makes no assumptions concerning whether the Liberal Quaker group will succeed in constructing a coherent and definitive new orthodoxy. However, it does argue that internal constructions which attempt to accommodate the diversity within the Liberal Quaker group are emerging, and that the nature and implications of these developments are worthy of study.

Accordingly, the project's central research question may be framed as: How does a liberal tradition accommodate diversity of opinion and what does this do to the organisational structures? Regarding the Liberal Quaker case and Dandelion's formulation around the process of constructing neo-orthodoxies, subsequent questions more specific to the field of Quaker Studies may be formulated, such as: How are Liberal Quakers going about

constructing candidate neo-orthodoxies in response to the theism–nontheism issue and their broader (a)theological diversity ahead of the forthcoming revision of the Quaker *Book of Discipline*? What do these neo-orthodoxies look like and how can they be understood?

In exploring these questions, the thesis will consider other previous sociological formulations from Dandelion. Dandelion contends that with regards to the common Liberal Quaker identity the role of theology has been largely marginalised, with the group's coherent sense of identity instead being based around orthopraxy, while normative belief is approached with what Dandelion calls an attitude of 'absolute perhaps' – a prescribed uncertainty around definitive theological belief-claims (2008a:33-36). The present thesis examines the extent to which Liberal Quakers have become internally self-aware of these formulations, making explicit suggestions towards their internal/emic adoption as a basis for Quaker identity.[4] However, the thesis argues that the current and ongoing discussions Quakers are having demonstrate that orthopraxy is liable to be destabilised as a basis for a coherent identity within the group. Quakers continue to reflect upon and engage with their understandings of their theology and group identity, in a manner that may be seen to both extend notions of Quaker 'practice' and re-open the group's theological discourse. Concerning belief, even if Dandelion's 'absolute perhaps' is taken to have some perspicacity as a formulation, the thesis argues that the details of how this 'absolute perhaps' might variously develop and manifest can be usefully 'thickened' (see §0.5). The thesis endeavours to offer such a thickened account (Geertz, 2017 [1973]:3-33).

[4] Emic and etic are terms from the discipline of Anthropology used to denote the perspective from which observations on a cultural group are being made. Emic refers an insider perspective from a subject within the group. Etic refers to an outsider perspective from some trying to observe the group from an impartial, objective (when studying religion often atheistic) stance. (See Davies 2002:22)

It is in following through on this anthropological/sociological thickening identified by the thesis that the project looks to make its central contribution to the field of knowledge. Essentially, through this thickening the thesis will seek to develop philosophical tools, primarily from language and ethics, to contextualise some of the debates around nontheism.

(0.3) Liberal Quakerism and Late Modernity

In delineating this thickened account and developing these philosophical tools, the thesis will engage with previous work done in the field of Quaker Studies along with sociological theories of late modernity (variously termed as post-, liquid, hyper-, radical, reflexive and high modernity). Additionally, the thesis engages with developments of thought seen in the projects of discourse theorists, postmodernist and/or post-structuralist thinkers. The developments of thought in these projects will be utilised as comparative resources for illuminating internal Liberal Quaker views which the thesis argues are emerging in response to analogous dynamics. The project therefore seeks to bridge into 'post-structuralism' from these sociological theories of late modernity. Thus the thesis is primarily engaging with postmodernism in the sociological context.

The sociological theories broadly relate to a concept of society characterised by attitudes of uncertainty, scepticism and/or incredulity towards definitive accounts of knowledge and meaning, and the dynamics of how such uncertainty developed. Given the pluralistic and

undefined character of Liberal Quaker belief – the diverse, permissive and shifting mode of views held within the group on both popular and institutional levels – these sociological theoretical formulations have been previously applied to academic and some internal considerations of Liberal Quakerism (Collins, 2008:38; Dandelion, 1996:319-321; Dandelion and Co`llins, 2014; Daniels, 2015b; Plüss, 2007:254; "Postmodern Quakerism?," 2009). One of the latest published papers to conceptualise Liberal Quakerism via one of these formulations, 'Transition as Normative: British Quakerism as Liquid Religion' (Dandelion and Collins, 2014), did so with reference to Bauman's concept of 'liquid modernity'. Collins and Dandelion contend that Liberal Quakerism could be understood as a liquid religion, in that it is highly malleable and lacks solid or definitive structures with reference to both its belief culture and its more general mode of organisation. They hold that this context has led Liberal Quakers to an understanding of theology as typified by liquidity, transition and change rather than 'a singular or fixed pattern of believing' (2014:299). The present thesis draws upon this work as one of the most recent and clearest explorations of Liberal Quaker dynamics which connects a sociological theory of late modernity with the emerging internal views of Liberal Quakers.

However, alongside a consideration of 'liquidity', alternative accounts of a comparable phenomenon have at points manifested as debates within the literature. These accounts relate to how much the said phenomenon should be viewed as a break with ostensibly modern attitudes towards knowledge and/or meaning, along with the extent to which such attitudes operate a scepticism towards the possibility of absolute or foundational truths. This thesis takes the position that many of the differences and disagreements between these various formulations can be understood as ones of semantics and degree. Many of

them, if not all, offer edifying insights into understanding Liberal Quakerism and its dynamics and development. For example, Jean-François Lyotard positioned the 'postmodern' 'incredulity towards metanarratives' of knowledge and meaning as relating to the proliferation and availability of information (1984 [1979]:xxiv). Explications of postmodernity will often place more emphasis, than alternative theoretical formulations of late modernity, on the awareness of a pluralism of worldviews as feeding into this incredulity.

The thesis does, however, take a particular interest in Anthony Giddens's (1991) formulation of radical modernity. Giddens advocates that the perception and development of knowledge and meaning within societies in a state of radical modernity has been influenced by the self-awareness or reflexivity of academic sociological critique (1991:15-16). This entails that individuals in society become aware of external ways of understanding the social dynamics of meaning-making in which they are engaged. Giddens holds that this has fed into a scepticism over the legitimacy of socially conveyed accounts of knowledge/meaning. He argues that this occurs because it leads individuals to situate themselves as abstracted from these social contexts and because the ever-developing nature of academic critique destabilises conviction in any claims to definitive knowledge/meaning (ibid.). Previous work in Quaker Studies, and particularly the work of Collins (2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2004, 2008; Dandelion and Collins, 2014), has argued that a high degree of reflexivity (in the sense used by Giddens, 1991) is at play in Liberal Quaker dynamics – a line of argument the thesis looks to build upon. An awareness of this dynamic is particularly significant as the thesis argues that such a dynamic of reflexivity is at play in informing both the diversifying, shifting and fluid dynamics of Liberal Quakerism and a

certain stream of responses Quakers are constructing in answer to such dynamics and subsequent challenges. Significantly, as with Bauman's formulations around liquid modernity, Giddens holds that diverse and shifting attitudes around knowledge and meaning do not necessarily entail an epistemological commitment to non-foundationalism. The thesis seeks to utilise this aspect of Giddens's formulation to frame questions concerning how Liberal Quakers are looking to formulate responses to the challenges of an uncertain and shifting dynamics around structures of meaning.

Alongside this consideration of sociological theories of late modernity, as indicated above, the thesis also draws on comparative resources from the more internal philosophical positions of certain postmodernist thinkers and discourse theorists (primarily Bakhtin, Levinas, Derrida and his commentators). Some of these thinkers (i.e. the Derrideans/post-structuralists) ostensibly hold the exact type of non-foundational positions towards knowledge which Giddens apparently seeks to refute. However, the thesis illustrates that these theorists have themselves reflected upon their philosophical accounts, responding to accusations of 'nihilism' and 'free play' by offering accounts of the motivations of their thought with potential religio-ethical implications (Kearney, 2004:154). In this sense it may be questioned whether some forms of ostensibly 'postmodernist' philosophical thought such as Derrida's are correctly thought of as non-foundationalist 'all the way down' (Critchley, 2009 [1999]:84). In any case the thesis illustrates that in their reflections these thinkers are (on an internal level) responding to analogous dynamics and challenges to the ones faced by the Liberal Quakers, i.e. a discursive landscape typified by diversification, shifting and a lack of closure. Thus, the thesis holds that they offer useful comparative

resources for understanding the internal responses and moves of thought being made by Liberal Quakers.

(0.4) Internal Responses

Accordingly, the thesis delineates and argues for two streams of responses that may be seen as emerging from the Liberal Quaker context and the theism–nontheism debate: (1) reflexive-structural responses and (2) alteristic responses:

(1) *Reflexive-structural responses* essentially exhibit Liberal Quakers' high level of reflexive self-awareness of the groups' dynamics, often bolstered via an engagement with academic critique. They respond to the group's diverse and at points conflicting (a)theological culture via claims that common internally cohering structures – be they behavioural, historical, traditional, narrative or cultural-linguistic – can be maintained on the reflexive and pragmatic basis that they function to maintain a distinct and definable sense of Liberal Quaker identity.

These responses include those instances of Liberal Quakers internally appealing to notions of orthopraxy and 'absolute perhaps' in a manner that mimics and even directly draws on Dandelion's sociological formulations. However, in line with the work of Collins (2008, 2004, 2002a, 2002b, 2002c) and Grant (2014), the thesis argues that reflexively noted structures can entail more discursive elements. The responses may be seen to parallel the thought of post-liberal theology, particularly

that of George Lindbeck (2009 [1984]), which has been explicitly referenced in both the academic Quaker Studies work (Grant, 2014) and some of the internal popular Quaker publications (Wood, 2016b; Russ, 2017).

The responses may be seen as close to a prominent expression of Quaker nontheism – i.e. Boulton–Cupitt nontheism – discussed in Chapter 3. However, the reflexive-structural responses aiming towards resolution differ primarily in two senses: (1) they remain more neutral on the question of whether there may be something of divine or ontological content outside of these structures; (2) they more pointedly promote the importance of maintaining these common structures (often over and above orthopraxy).

The thesis aims to demonstrate the emergence of these responses in the internal Liberal Quaker discursive landscape via textual data drawn from popular Quaker publications, periodicals, and blog posts, including some outputs more closely related to the group's institutional structures and process of revision (e.g. bulletins from Meeting for Sufferings and *God, Words and Us* (Rowlands, 2017).

(2) *Alteristic responses* can be seen to parallel the developments of thought seen in Bakhtin's development of a 'philosophical anthropology' (Collins, 2002b:294) and Derrida's religio-ethical turn (Glendinning, 2011:78). A similar line of development is also apparent in Zygmunt Bauman's delineation of a postmodern ethics (1993). These thinkers have positioned these accounts as responses to the view that certain accounts of human 'discourses' entail an anti-systematic continual diversification,

shifting and ‘free-play’ (Kearney, 2004:154). Generalising in the extreme, what may be taken as a typical response follows the line that these accounts are both motivated by and further facilitate an ethical concern for openness towards otherness (or alterity). Particularly in the work of Derrida (following Levinas), this ethic is positioned as informing an experiential phenomenology of ethical anxiety, which this thesis connects with a transmuted manifestation of the ‘absolute perhaps’. Additionally, Derrida positions such an understanding of ethics as breaking down the divide between ethics and religiosity; between the experience of encountering a divine, theistic other and others more generally (Derrida, 2008 [1999]:84; Sherwood and Hart, 2004:38).

Subsequently, the thesis aims to demonstrate a comparable stream of responses from Liberal Quakers looking to resolve the theism–nontheism divide and related group dynamics. Quakers engaged in constructing such responses exhibit a concern for maintaining an understanding of an experiential religiosity at the core of the Liberal Quaker movement and, currently, an awareness of Quaker diversity and a resistance to more rigid structural understandings of the Quaker identity and/or definitive closure of the Quaker ‘tradition’.

The thesis explores how such responses seek to synergise the differing positions within the Liberal Quaker group, and ultimately manifest by appealing to features such as relationality, other-directedness, hospitality, vulnerability, a radical understanding of nonviolence and an open eschatology.

The thesis has coined the term and concept 'alteristic' in order to refer to these responses collectively; the term reflects the general concern exhibited in the responses for holding to alterity.

The thesis demonstrates the emergence of these types of responses via an engagement with previous work in the field of Quaker Studies, which suggests the development of such lines of thought within the current direction of the Quaker movement. Data is also drawn from internal primary texts specifically engaging with the issue of nontheism.

(0.5) Methodology and Theory

The project's methodology is primarily based in theoretical sociology. Interdisciplinary aspects will be brought in from anthropology and theology, and in the form of philosophical tools from 'postmodernist' thinkers, in order to develop a thickened understanding of the Liberal Quaker dynamics that are the focus of the present investigation; but the thickening is chiefly performed within a sociological context. The project is also strongly located within the field of Quaker Studies, drawing extensively on the work of Dandelion and other 'Quaker' sociologists, alongside relevant anthropological, philosophical and theological work from within the field.

Concerning the use made in the thesis of the broader field of theoretical sociology, the intention is to build a framework for understanding the organisational structure of Liberal Quakerism and to illuminate the group's subsequent development in light of Liberal

Quakers' close and largely positive relationship with the values and implications of modernity.[5] To this end, the opening, contextualising chapter will draw upon elements from the sociological canon, notably Peter Berger (2011a [1967]), whose work will be employed to frame questions around what happens when a group pluralises and allows its communal consensus-based boundaries, or plausibility structures, to become more permeable, alongside the work of Ernest Troelstch (1992 [1931]) and Colin Campbell (1978), which will be used to frame the possible development of new forms of religiosity within a group such as the Liberal Quakers. In the subsequent chapter the thesis will move to consider some sociological theories of 'late modernity' and engage extensively with the work of Giddens and Bauman as referred to above (see §0.3). These theories of 'late modernity' will be used both to further elucidate the current hyper-liberal dynamics of the Liberal Quaker group and its development, and to build a consideration of how Quakers are internally responding to contemporary challenges to their group structures. Regarding this consideration of internal responses, as indicated, the project will make particular use of Giddens' formulations around a radically modern reflexivity or self-awareness, which this thesis will demonstrate to be highly relevant to a consideration of modern Liberal Quakerism.

These broader theoretical considerations build into the thesis' engagement with Quaker Studies. Here, the thesis draws extensively on the work Dandelion. To an extent the project may be seen as seeking to update Dandelion's work, particularly his doctoral research in the 1990s, which was concurrent with the effective resolution of the Quaker Universalist–Christocentric debate.[6] Methodologically, Dandelion approaches his work from a broadly

[5] See discussion in Chapters 1 and 2.
[6] See §1.3

sociological neo-functionalist perspective. Originating in the work of Emilie Durkheim ([1912] 2008), functional perspectives view social groups, such as the Liberal Quakers, as made up of 'interconnected' parts which work to function as a coherent 'whole'. Functionalist accounts analyse how these parts relate both to each other and to the whole. Dandelion is careful to note that under this neo-functionalist approach he does not view all parts of the Quaker group as working towards this coherent stability and depicts the acceptance ('credalisation') 'of pluralism as dysfunctional' (Dandelion 1996:32-34). However, Dandelion's formulations of Liberal Quakerism cohering around orthopraxy and a *prescribed* 'absolute perhaps' demonstrate that his conclusions still mark out the trajectory of Liberal Quaker dynamics with reference to definitive formulations and a functional coherence (2008a:33-36).

The thesis departs from Dandelion methodologically in being primarily concerned with examining the internal discussions of Liberal Quakers and seeking to give a more detailed examination of a variety of the current perspectives held amongst Liberal Quakers alongside the dynamics and tensions between them. In its examination of Quaker attempts to construct neo-orthodoxies, the thesis may seem to uphold the proposal that Quakers are aiming towards a functional coherence. However, the thesis is concerned with the constructions born out of 'actors accounts', rather than understanding those actors via a single external theoretical construction relating to the functioning of their group as a coherent 'whole'. In line with previous criticisms of functionalist approaches, the thesis may be seen as engaging with an (in this case reflexively interrelated yet) 'alternative reading to sociological analysis' (Wallis and Bruce 1986:30, cited in: Dandelion 1996:34). Consequently, whilst holding that Dandelion's formulations around orthopraxy and the 'absolute perhaps'

contain merit, it argues that the way such phenomena are internally interpreted and manifest amongst Liberal Quakers (the manner in which Quakers internally engage with the tension between a desire for coherence and their acceptance of dysfunctional parts) is more fluid and multifaceted than Dandelion's formulations represent.

Thus, as mentioned, the thesis attempts to give a 'thicker' description of Quaker developments and emerging views. The concept of 'thick description', as developed by the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, entails giving a closer examination of the internal ('emic') accounts of subjects within the context of a particular social/cultural phenomenon, as opposed to offering more general, surface-level theoretical constructions (2017:3-33). In this case it relates to questions such as: if Quakers are based around practice and orthopraxy and/or an attitude of 'absolute perhaps', how do they emically understand and engage with this? Do they attempt to make any further internal formulations stemming from this? The thesis argues that they do, and that these further manifestations and developments can be usefully understood via both a further exploration of the implications of the sociological work (especially that of Giddens and Bauman) and a comparison between developments in Quaker thought and those found in the projects of discourse theorists and 'postmodernist' and/or 'post-structuralist' thinkers (especially that of Bakhtin and Derrida), relating respectively to the thesis's delineation of reflexive-structural and alteristic responses.

In performing this thickening the thesis will demonstrate the relevance of Giddens' formulations around reflexivity to the Liberal Quaker case. Indeed, as mentioned, the thesis will show how Liberal Quakers are directly (albeit idiosyncratically) reflexively employing

Dadelion's external sociological formulations in their own internal constructions. This reflexive yet idiosyncratic awareness may be seen as one of the factors influencing the fluid and mutable features of Liberal Quakerism and one of the reasons a clean application of Dandelion's formulations is liable to break down.

Admittedly, Dandelion and particularly Collins have previously discussed such dynamics within the group (Dandelion and Collins 2014; Collins 2002a, 2002b, 2002c). However, this project aims to go further in giving a deeper exploration and thicker description of the way the internal constructions, debates and tensions play out within the group. Thus, the work will also draw upon and develop philosophical tools principally around language and ethics in order to illuminate the dynamics and interplay of various elements of emerging Quaker thought. Alongside an exploration of the work of Grant (2014) on Quaker language-use, these philosophical tools will be developed through an engagement with the projects of discourse theorists, 'postmodernist' and/or 'post-structuralist' thinkers. The thesis will position these thinkers as responding to analogous challenges to those currently faced by Liberal Quakers. Whilst these theorists, particularly the 'post-structuralists' (i.e. Derrida and his later commentators), are typically framed in opposition to Giddens' account of radical modernity (Giddens, 1991:150), the thesis will argue that they are better positioned as reflective of the type of internal 'philosophical' trajectories of thought that occur within a sociological context of post(-) and/or late modernity, such as the one delineated by Giddens. Subsequently, the project will demonstrate that these thinkers do showcase a tendency to reflect on the implications of their accounts of discourse and meaning, along with attempts to respond to philosophical positions falling into a mere proliferation of free play (responses that principally revolve around ethical concerns for alterity). The thesis

takes these attempts as resources that may be fruitfully compared with the moves and developments currently manifesting in Liberal Quaker thought as represented in the religious group's internal literature.

The primary empirical data is drawn from internal Quaker texts and blogs and will be approached qualitatively. However, the thesis is liable to encounter inherent challenges in keeping a clear distinction and/or separation between primary and secondary data and between Quaker views and the comparative points from philosophical/theological projects. This is in part owing to the high degree of reflexivity which the thesis contends is at play within the group of study. Such a dynamic can also leave the academic with little to add, as Collins expresses:

> What is the anthropologist left with when his/her informants are capable of this level of analysis – even drawing on those self-same theorists one is drawing on as an academic? How does the anthropologist go beyond such reflection? My feeling remains that it is pointless to try and 'trump' adepts' accounts; the anthropologist can only record them, understand how and why they compare, and set his/her own account alongside them. (2002c:90)

On a certain level the thesis follows Collins' suggestion of setting academic/philosophical accounts alongside those of Quakers whilst attempting to tease out trends. However, concerning the question of 'why they compare', such reflexivity can also cause problems of cross-contamination with reference to the thesis' approach. It is difficult to definitively determine what factors cause the comparability when one group occasionally draws directly from the field of discourse with which one is making comparisons. However, Quakers'

reflexive use of theorists is not consistent or uniform, and it would be incorrect to say all instances of convergence are simply the result of direct engagement. Furthermore, the thesis aims to demonstrate that these responses are being suggested by Quakers as a response to their diversity and points of (a)theological tension and that such dynamics are certainly a major factor in the adoption of such positions.

In illuminating Quaker dynamics and carrying out its comparative work, however, the thesis must make its own generalisations to be of any sense and/or theoretical or predictive utility. This presents certain problems, particularly with regard to the thesis' work to demonstrate the emergence of alteristic responses. The thesis is aiming to draw comparisons between an element of the Liberal Quaker group and theorists whose views and accounts of meaning are in large part pluralistic, anti-systematic and resist definite closure. In a sense, this aspect of the thesis may be seen as attempting to lump the splitters (Palmer, 1979). The thesis will attempt to suggest a more generalised formulation of how such responses might manifest, and consequently how they aim to resolve divides within group. However, given the anti-systematic character of these views, and the fact that the Quaker views are nascent and exhibit internal diversity, it is fairer to say that the comparisons drawn are done on the basis of a family resemblance model (Wittgenstein, 2009 [1953]:36). Following the thought of Ludwig Wittgenstein on games, family resemblance models suggest that phenomena that seem to be associated through a common core feature may in fact be related, and resemble each other via a set of overlapping though not universally present features (ibid.). In the case of the alteristic views considered by this thesis, such features may be seen to include concerns for relationality, other-directedness, hospitality, nonviolence, vulnerability and an open eschatology.

(0.6) Chapter Overview

Chapter 1 of the thesis is largely a contextualising chapter. It opens with a consideration of the development of Liberal Quakerism from its inception up until the last revision of the *Book of Discipline* in 1994. Drawing insights from Peter Berger and previous work in Quaker Studies, the chapter argues that the inception of Liberal Quakerism and some subsequent developments may be viewed as an embracing of the implications of modernity. An explication is given of the pluralisation of belief within Liberal Quakerism and its shift from a Christian to a post-Christian context. The thesis argues that, in the last version of the *Book of Discipline* this theological diversity was largely accommodated in line with 'universalist assumptions' – that is, assumptions related to there being a religious experience of universal origin which can be linguistically expressed in a variety of ways. The accommodating universalist assumptions are therefore positioned as the old 'Quaker orthodoxy' which the emergence of nontheism challenges, creating pressure for the construction of neo-orthodoxies and the new revision.

The chapter also considers this universalist position in relation to 'mystic-type' religion, understood by Ernest Troeltsch (1992) and Colin Campbell (1978) as the 'secret religion of the educated classes', arguing that this fits the Liberal Quaker case. The chapter argues that the religion of the educated classes does not necessarily remain static, and advocates that the thesis' delineation of reflexive-structural and/or alteristic responses may be understood as new, alternative forms of religiosity. Regarding questions of whether these developments

are best understood as alternative forms of religiosity or permutations on the road to secularisation,[7] the chapter remains neutral, viewing them as worthy of study and thickening regardless.

Chapter 2 examines previous conceptualisations from academics in the field of Quaker Studies which suggest that Liberal Quakerism has diversified beyond an accommodating universalist theological rationale, namely Dandelion's formulations around the behavioural creed (orthodoxy) and the absolute perhaps. The chapter considers and argues along with previous concerns that even these suggested points of 'coherence' are not as stable as they might seem given the current dynamics of the group.

The chapter considers the extent to which the current context and dynamics of Liberal Quakerism may usefully be understood with reference to theories of 'late modernity'. Concerning the ostensibly opposed theories of postmodernity and 'hypermodernity', the chapter argues that the differences are largely ones of semantics and degree, and all such formulations may be usefully edifying in the Liberal Quaker case. The chapter does hold that Liberal Quakerism is probably not best understood as non-foundationalist 'all the way down' (Critchley, 2009:84), and that the dynamic of reflexivity highlighted in the work of Giddens is particularly pertinent to the Liberal Quaker case. However, the chapter also notes that philosophical positions often associated with postmodernism are not necessarily themselves non-foundational 'all the way down', with the relevant theorists developing comparatively useful reflections. From this, the chapter seeks to give a more detailed

[7] The secularisation thesis is understood in line with Berger as the thesis that modernity and 'Modernization necessarily leads to a decline of religion, both in society and in the minds of individuals.' (1999:2)

delineation of how Quakers may internally respond to the uncertain and shifting dynamics of their discursive landscape, in line with what the thesis terms reflexive-structural responses and alteristic responses.

Chapter 3 focuses on giving a more detailed exploration of the emergence and exact nature of Quaker nontheism. It begins by re-establishing that nontheistic, agnostic and/or atheist type beliefs are no longer quasi-concealed marginal beliefs held amongst some Liberal Quakers on an individual level, but are being visibly expressed and debated on the popular level. It explores the different forms this expression of nontheism takes, noting that the beliefs that fall under the label of 'nontheism' themselves take diverse forms. However, special attention is paid to the form of nontheism promoted by David Boulton and underpinned by the philosophy of Don Cupitt, as it is the form most prominently expressed in the popular literature. The chapter argues that the increased visibility of nontheism and the manner in which Quakers have engaged with the issue of theism–nontheism represents an intensification of Quakers' confronting and becoming internally aware of the types of dynamics outlined in the previous chapters. Crucially, the chapter demonstrates that aspects of Quaker nontheism (Boulton–Cupitt), are not compatible with the formerly accommodating universalist-type assumptions. Furthermore, the chapter contends that the broader approach of the Liberal Quaker group to the issue of nontheism indicates they are unlikely to disbar those Boulton–Cupitt nontheists who cannot be accommodated under universalist-type assumptions, but rather are directly engaging with them. Significantly, the chapter demonstrates a growing commitment amongst Quakers to respect difference by not employing the conflict resolution tactic of claiming they are speaking about a common experience by using different words (Plüss, 2007:261,265). This adds further credence to the

notion that the universalist accommodation is explicitly breaking down, opening the way for alternative formulations of the common Quaker identity and/or candidate neo-orthodoxies.

Chapter 4 focuses on demonstrating and exploring the stream of emerging views that the thesis labels as reflexive-structural. Given that the Boulton–Cupitt view of religion is to a degree a reflexive-structural one, the chapter opens by considering in more detail how Boulton–Cupitt style nontheists look to position themselves as having an authentic place within the wider Quaker community. In the Quaker popular literature nontheists primarily attempt to do this via two conceptual moves: (1) they reinterpret the Quaker 'religious experience' as referring to an individualised 'religious' journey and then move to claim that they are 'seekers', positioning this orientation for seeking as relating to being authentically Quaker – in line with Dandelion's 'absolute perhaps' (2008a:33-36); (2) they claim that the Quaker group maintains communal coherence via adherence to a common behaviour and/or practice – partly in line with Dandelion's behavioural creed (2008a:25-33, 1996:100-110). Therefore, these nontheists are largely conforming to Dandelion's sociological formulations around Quaker coherence, at points directly referencing Dandelion's work. Thus, these positions are indicative of the reflexivity of sociological critique viewed by Giddens as typical of late modernity (1991). The chapter notes that many Quakers more broadly (i.e. not Boulton–Cupitt nontheists) are making similar reflexive-internal appeals to practice as a basis for coherence within the broader Quaker group, including publications that are more closely related to British Quakerism's institutional structures (Kirk-Smith, 2013; Rowlands, 2017).

Consequently, the chapter considers the extent to which orthopraxy is shifting to be internally and explicitly promoted as the primary basis for the coherence of Liberal Quakerism as a cohesive religious group – with the role of discursive theological claims being 'marginalised' (2008a:22, 1996:290). However, the chapter explores ways the Quaker discursive landscape may be said to be re-opening in ways that may potentially relate to internal understanding of the Quaker identity and/or theological 'orthodoxy'. The manner in which some Quakers internally align with behavioural features as a basis for cohesion is not a clear-cut reflexive deployment of Dandelion's concept. The chapter notes that Quakers' internal, multivariate and idiosyncratic interpretations and expanded interpretations of Quaker practice may bring in considerations of features such as Quaker values – features with potentially more discursive content. The chapter further examines the expanded notions of Quaker practice with reference to Quaker testimonies, an element of the Quaker culture which Dandelion himself places as split between the Quaker 'double-culture' (1996:121-123).

The chapter further considers the comparable academic formulations of Collins (2002a, 2002b, 2002c) and Grant (2014), which the chapter argues, again, suggest that there may be typical Quaker 'practices' which contain more discursive elements. Grant suggests that Liberal Quakers respond to their diverse belief culture via a 'practice' of constructing list-format remarks following implicit grammatical type rules (2014:129), even further suggesting that these rules have theological implications (2014:164). Collins similarly suggests that Quakers are collectively engaged in constructing a certain 'genre' of Quaker discourse in reference to which one can learn a certain 'feel for the game' of Liberal Quakerism (2002b:292). The chapter notes that such formulations have utility in

illuminating how nontheist Quakers position themselves within Quakerism. However, with reference to these academic formulations, the chapter ultimately looks to demonstrate that, as with appeals to orthopraxy, Liberal Quakers are making reflexive internal appeals to broader and more discursive, communally constructed and/or recognised structures (be they historical, traditional, narrative and/or idiomatic) as a basis for a common sense of Liberal Quaker identity and/or orthodoxy. The chapter seeks to demonstrate this via an engagement with the internal output of Quaker commentators and bloggers (Daniels, 2015a; Wood, 2016a, 2016b; Russ 2017).

Chapter 5 demonstrates the emergence of alteristic responses within the Liberal Quaker discursive landscape. The chapter understands these responses primarily in relation to Bakhtin, Derrida, Levinas and Bauman, as explored in Chapter 2 (§2.5.2). Such responses concern an attitude of openness and/or hospitality towards otherness. The chapter indicates that these responses may be seen as manifesting with reference to a set of family resemblance features, such as concerns for relationality, other-directedness, hospitality, nonviolence, vulnerability and an open eschatology. The chapter examines how the dynamics of these alteristic responses may interrelate and how they seek to synergise and resolve points of Liberal Quaker division.

The chapter is sensitive to the possibility that such an alteristic ethic may be framed as a potential constitutive element of Liberal Quaker religiosity, spirituality and/or phenomenology of the Liberal Quaker religious experience, thus allowing for the possibility of re-framing the Quaker experience as a religio-ethical one, so offering a potential route towards breaking down the binary distinction between religious/theistic positions and

humanist/nontheistic ones. These responses are susceptible to being understood as a manifestation of Dandelion's 'absolute perhaps'. However, as indicated, if they are understood as a (plausibly reflexive) internalisation of the 'absolute perhaps', this may be seen to entail a shift. This shift amounts to positioning an attitude of 'perhaps', not simply as an epistemological claim, but as an informing part of Quaker religiosity potentially animating the Quaker religious experience itself.

The chapter demonstrates the emergence of these types of responses via an engagement with previous work in the field of Quaker Studies. This suggests the development of such lines of thought within the current direction of the Quaker movement, along with data drawn from internal primary texts specifically engaging with the issue of nontheism, some of which indicate a closer relation to the group's institutional structures and the process of revision (Rowlands, 2017; Russ, 2018). The chapter argues that these sources indicate that such responses are emerging within the Liberal discursive landscape and are to an extent being constructed into neo-orthodox candidates. Whether they will achieve the position of 'new orthodoxy' is, at the point of writing, unclear but unlikely, however, it is argued that they are likely to have some influence on the new *Book of Discipline*.

Overall, the thesis hopes to give a nuanced thickened exploration of how the Liberal Quakers, as practitioners of a theologically permissive, hyper-liberal and/or liquid religion, are looking to construct neo-orthodox candidates that seek to accommodate the diversity of belief including elements of nontheism within their group. The thesis argues that the content of these constructions can be usefully illuminated via a comparison with developments in the thought of postmodernist thinkers and/or discourse theorists, who

attempt to give responses to comparable 'structural' contexts and challenges. In doing so, it suggests that seemingly liquid, fragmentary or 'dysfunctional' structures of meaning and/or coherence do not necessarily lead to a simple dissolution. Rather, the more liquid or fragmenting structures can inform certain phenomenological responses and/or the construction of certain types of belief claims. Considered in relation to Campbell's contention of 'educated classes' engaging in mystical alternative forms of religiosity, the Quaker emerging views represent new alternative forms of religiosity, indicating that the character of the religion of the educated classes does not necessarily remain static. Even if such developments are understood as permutations on the road to secularisation, the details of these permutations are worthy of thickening and further study.

The thesis notes that in the Liberal Quaker case there are potential points of synergy between emerging alteristic responses and particularities of the Quaker tradition – namely those revolving around the commitment to nonviolence. Consequently, the thesis suggests that an outcome of the theism–nontheism debate may be an increased foregrounding of the valuing of nonviolence in Quaker discussions and expressions of the Quaker identity. However, the thesis also holds that the trajectory of the Liberal Quaker case has broader edifying implications for the development of other liberal and pluralistic groups within a societally secular and radically modern context.

(0.7) Summary

This introduction has framed and outlined the problem with which Liberal Quakers are currently engaging: that is, the pluralism of their group, including the emergence of

nontheism, and the subsequent challenge of constructing neo-orthodoxy candidates ahead of the forthcoming revision of the *Book of Discipline*. Broadly speaking, it is views emerging from this process that the thesis seeks to examine and elucidate. The Introduction has given an outline to the project's theoretical and methodological approach and an overview of the arguments and chapters of the thesis. Chapter 1 will now focus on contextualising the development of Liberal Quakerism, primarily up until the previous revision of the *Book of Discipline* in 1994.

Chapter 1

Liberal Quakerism: Inception, Initial Pluralisation and a Universalist Accommodation

(1.0) Introduction

This chapter is largely a contextualising chapter. It opens with a consideration of Quaker history, particularly the development of Liberal Quakerism from its inception up until the last revision of the *Book of Discipline* in 1994. Drawing insights from Peter Berger and previous work in Quaker Studies, the chapter argues that the inception of Liberal Quakerism and some subsequent developments may be viewed as an embracing of the implications of modernity. An explication is given of the pluralisation of belief within Liberal Quakerism and its shift from a Christian to a post-Christian context. The thesis argues that in the last version of the *Book of Discipline*, Quaker theological diversity was largely accommodated in line with 'universalist assumptions' – that is, assumptions related to there being a religious experience of universal origin which can be linguistically expressed in a variety of ways. The accommodating universalist assumptions are therefore positioned as the old 'Quaker orthodoxy' which the emergence of nontheism challenges, feeding into the pressure for the construction of neo-orthodoxies and the new revision.

The chapter also considers this universalist position in relation to 'mystic-type' religion, understood by Ernest Troeltsch (1992) and Colin Campbell (1978) as the 'secret religion of

the educated classes', arguing that this fits the Liberal Quaker case. The chapter argues that the religion of the educated classes does not necessarily remain static, and advocates that the thesis's delineation of reflexive-structural and/or alteristic responses may be understood as new alternative forms of religiosity. However, regarding questions of whether these developments are best understood as alternative forms of religiosity or as permutations on the road to secularisation, the chapter remains neutral, viewing them as worthy of study and thickening regardless.

(1.1) Early Quakerism

The Religious Society of Friends originated in England c.1652, one of many religious movements that originated in the tumultuous period around the English Civil War. The inspiration of the movement lies principally in the religious experiences and subsequent teachings of George Fox. In the years preceding Quakerism's formation, Fox travelled widely as part of a 'spiritual quest'. He was concerned with questions of how one could discern legitimate religious authority, how one could discern 'what is of God'. Already sceptical of the teachings of university-trained priests and the institutionalised church of the period, Fox found the solution to his religious search when he turned 'inward', undergoing a transformative religious experience in 1647 (Dandelion, 2007:21). The insight Fox developed and promoted from this experience, forming the basis for the Quaker movement, was that 'what is of God' was first and foremost to be known 'experimentally', i.e. through direct experience of divine revelation:

> I had forsaken all the priests … I left the separate preachers also … for I saw there was none among them that could speak to my condition … I had nothing outwardly to help me … then, oh then I heard a voice which said, 'There is one, Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition,' and when I heard this my heart did leap for joy. Then the Lord did let me see why there was no one upon earth that could speak to my condition, namely, that I might give him all the glory … Jesus Christ might have the pre-eminence, who enlightens, and gives grace, and faith, and power. Thus when God doth work who shall let [i.e. hinder] it? And this I knew experimentally.
> (Nickalls, 2014 [1952]:11)

In line with the more general Protestant principle of 'the priesthood of all believers', Quakerism from its beginnings has also operated with an egalitarian emphasis: this experience of revelation was not particular to Fox but was available to all (Dandelion 2007:21). This focus on individuals' personal experiences as opposed to the teachings of established religion partially informs the group's historical opposition to creeds and doctrines. It is this 'legacy' of opposing definitive statements of belief in favour of direct individual experience that has been identified as helping 'to accommodate [the] theological pluralism' that has later become a feature of Liberal British Quakerism (Dandelion, 2008a:22, 2004:220, 1996:93; Plüss, 1995:118).

However, the scope for theological diversification in early Quakerism should not be thought of as too extensive. Whilst Fox eschewed formal creeds and placed religious authority as primarily originating in individual experience, as Dandelion points out (2008a:22; 2007:130), Fox held that the insights emerging from these experience were consequently validated via their correspondence with Biblical scripture:

> Now the Lord God hath opened to me by his invisible power how that every man was enlightened by the divine light of Christ … This I saw in the pure openings of the Light without the help of any man, neither did I then know where to find it in the Scriptures; though afterwards, searching the Scriptures, I found it.

(Nickalls, 2014:33)

Thus, the early Quakers grounded their experiences with reference to Christian scripture. It is important to note that initially these experiences were understood as Christian experiences comprised of an intimacy with Christ.

Furthermore, there was an apocalyptic aspect to early Quakerism, with the 'Light of Christ' and the Quaker religious experience being related to a 'spiritual' coming of the Kingdom of God. This fed into ideas that Quakers were an elect people, separate from a 'profane' world (Dandelion, 2007:25-31). This led the group into developing standards concerning how they interacted with the world, often defining themselves in opposition to wider mainstream society. Early Quakers[8] operated boundary-marking practices and proscriptions around, for example, endogamy, wearing plain dress, not practising hat-honour, and using 'thee' and 'thou' – although many, if not all, of these practices have now broken down (Dandelion, 1996:121).

However, the tendency of early Quakers to define themselves as separate from wider society is still potentially significant to the current dynamics considered by this thesis. Gay Pilgrim contends that Quakers' historical tendency to define themselves as non-conformist and alternative to wider mainstream society has informed what (drawing on Foucault) she terms 'a heterotopic impulse'.[9] Pilgrim points to examples of early Quakers transforming traditional central spaces into sites of 'Otherness', with 'alternate orderings' – e.g. turning

[8] That is, those preceding the inception of the Liberal form.
[9] The concept of heterotopia and its application to Quakerism is further discussed in §2.2, §2.4.1, and §5.1.1.2.

churches into meeting houses and courtrooms into preaching opportunities – as demonstrative of the development of this heterotopic impulse (2008:55-59). She holds that this impulse is still present and has now turned inward, with Liberals Quakers now maintaining their non-conformist identity by defining themselves as 'alternate' to other elements within the group, feeding into the diversification and fragmentation of the group.

Here, though, the important point is that early Quakers were a Christian group which still had an 'emphasis on scriptural authority' (Dandelion, 2007:7), and that this, along with other distinctive identity markers, lent Quakers some mechanisms by which to define themselves and maintain stability and coherence, both in terms of their beliefs around the Quaker religious experience and as a group.

(1.2) Inception of Liberal Quakerism: Embracing the Implications of Modernity and Pluralisation

Quakerism's trajectory towards theological pluralisation was opened up with the creation of the Liberal strand. The formation of the Liberal strand of Quakerism can be dated to the late 19th century, with its beginnings in Britain most commonly placed at the 1895 Manchester Conference (Davie, 1997; Heron, 1997; Punshon, 2006 [1984]:240-241). The development of the Liberal strand was largely a response to the challenges posed by modernity to religion, in the form of evolutionary theory and the Higher Biblical Criticism[10] (Dandelion, 2007:117,120). From the outset Liberal Quakerism was a 'modernist vision', embracing

[10] I.e. an approach to Biblical study that takes into account the broader historical contexts and origins of the ancient texts. (Colwell, 1948)

many of the liberal values of wider modern society (2007:129). Punshon says that at the conference: 'It was asserted roundly that modern thought, far from being evil, was largely a blessing to be accepted and used, and forlornly to be opposed' (2006:240-241). In this sense Liberal Quakerism can be seen to be responding to the same issues as the development of other forms of liberal theology, and there is certainly an affinity and a degree of cross-fertilisation between the two.

In *British Quaker Theology Since 1895* (1997), the theologian Martin Davie (who ultimately left Quakerism, considering its theology to have become too liberal and 'radical' (1997:8)) argues for a close relationship between Liberal Quakerism and 'modern thought' and/or liberal theology (1997:70-189). He identifies 'seven beliefs … common to liberal theologians outside Quakerism as well as those within it, and described by speakers at the Manchester Conference' (Grant, 2014:31). Notably, one of these was the view that 'theology had ultimately to be based on an appeal to immediate experience of God' (1997:72). Davie's delineation of liberal modern theological thought may be connected with Troeltsch's and Campbell's claim that modern educated people have a particular affinity for mystic-type religion with a focus on individual immediate experience.[11]

A valuing of individualism is a key factor informing both Quakers' esteem for direct experience and their subsequent receptiveness to liberal, even 'radical' or 'hyper-liberal', forms (Davie, 1997; Dandelion and Collins, 2008:1). However, Davie emphasises the significance of the theory of evolution. He argues that God moved to being placed as

[11] Discussed further in §1.4.

working '… in and through the evolutionary process …' rather than via direct divine intervention (1997:72). The development of the Higher Biblical Criticism can also be seen as significant; as Punshon says: '… many convinced Christians came to the conclusion that if the Bible were authoritative its authority lay elsewhere than in its infallible text' (2006:243). In searching for a new source of authority, liberal theologies may be seen to have turned to a notion of immediate experience. On the surface this move appears to resonate with the traditional positions and values of early Quakers. However, this aspect is particularly noteworthy, as it puts pressure on the early Quaker principle of discerning and verifying the validity of experience and subsequent ministry by reference to Biblical scripture.

Considering the particularities of Liberal Quakerism, Dandelion describes Davie as identifying four key principles (related to liberal theological beliefs) that typified Liberal Quakerism in its inception:

> 1. That experience was primary;
> 2. That faith needed to be relevant to the age;
> 3. That Friends were to be open to 'new Light';
> 4. That new revelation had an automatic authority over old revelation and that God's Truth was revealed gradually to us over time: the idea of 'Progressivism'.
> (Dandelion, 2007:129-30, 2008a:22; Davie, 1997:67-72)

Liberal Quakerism, with its emphasis on the religious experience as primary, has framed itself as in continuity with the principles of early Quakerism. This reflects how early Quakerism was perhaps particularly susceptible to these liberal or modern developments. However, Dandelion contends that the shift represents one of the biggest breaks in the Society's traditional views precisely because the validity of religious experiences was no

longer discerned by reference to scripture (2007:130; 2008a:22). A view of the Bible as fallible 'demoted' the authority of scripture. This authority was instead located in the 'experience alone' – if necessary, Liberal Quakers tend to test the validity of ministry given during meeting by reference to the consensus of the group, relying on 'numbers or [the] collective experience' (1996:12; 2008a:22-31).

Given this decoupling from scripture and tradition along with commitments to 'Progressivism' and being 'open to "new Light"', Dandelion contends that 'it was inevitable that Liberal Quaker believing would become pluralistic' (Dandelion, 2005:66-67). Caroline Plüss makes a similar observation, placing her characterisation of the movement as structurally 'fluid, changing and open-ended' as deriving from the Quaker 'view that their beliefs stem from ongoing religious experiences' (1998:234). Given the increasing pluralisation of Liberal Quakerism, Dandelion and Plüss seem to be correct.[12]

However, whilst the inception of Liberal Quakerism may have opened up Quakerism's potential for theological pluralisation and permissive fluidity, it did not start out with the intention of driving Quakerism towards this permissive, plural and post-Christian context. Davie is clear that initially Liberal Quakers (and liberal theologians more broadly) still had a notion of Christ at the core of their theology (1997:92). It was through the life and example of Christ that one gained access to an immediate experience and relation with God (Punshon 2006:245). This mind-set reflects liberal theology and Quakerism as a modernist project. A key conceptualisation of typically modern or modernist epistemological/philosophical positions is that, whilst a scepticism is operated regarding the

[12] Discussed in the Introduction, §0.1

authority of tradition in legitimising belief claims (e.g. eschewing a traditional belief in biblical infallibility), it is still held that a definitive truth exists that can be progressed towards through individual reason (Davie, 2007:107). For liberal Christians of the 19th century (including the first Liberal Quakers), their individual reason and immediate experiences told them that Christianity was true (indeed, this is still true of many Liberal Christians today). Furthermore, in their eyes, as Punshon says: 'the message of history was that the world would be won for Christ' (2006:246). In the late 19th century Liberal Quakers felt comfortable decoupling themselves from scripture and turning towards an individual view of Christian mysticism because it sat alongside a characteristically modern view of a grand narrative that the world would progress towards the truth of Christianity (and Quakerism).

(1.2.1) Peter Berger: Plausibility Structures, Pluralism and Boundaries in Modernity

Before delving into an exploration of internal developments, it is pertinent to consider an external academic formulation concerning the dynamics between social cohesion and the beliefs of individuals, particularly within religious groups. A consideration of Berger is useful to this chapter for a number of reasons:

(1) He gives a clear delineation of how cohesive group structures can influence beliefs and the phenomenological lives of individuals within the said group;

(2) He speaks to how being open to modern values or pluralism can exacerbate pluralisation and breakdown;

(3) In later work he considers how religious groups may look to sustain themselves in the face of the challenges posed by pluralism and the wider implications of modernity.

Considering the concerns of the present project, and looking at how Liberal Quakers are developing in response to the above challenges, (3) is of particular interest. Berger held that religious groups could look to maintain cohering mechanisms around group belief by erecting boundaries. This section of the thesis positions this in contrast to the Liberal Quakers, who have embraced the implications of modernity and their later pluralisation. However, this aspect of Berger's thought gives a framework for considering the extent to which Liberal Quakers may be seen to operate softer and/or more implicit boundaries.[13] Relevantly, Berger has also given accounts of his own personal religiosity, which he holds on an emic level, separate from his academic formulations concerning religious groups and institutions.

Berger's key thesis on social cohesion and individuals' phenomenological lives (including their sense of legitimate beliefs or knowledge) is that they inform one another in a nexus relationship. This was first seen in his collaboration with Thomas Luckmann: *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in The Sociology of Knowledge* (2011 [1966]). Berger's formulation begins with the claim that individuals construct society. It is the – perceived as legitimate – subjective and internal experiences and beliefs of individuals (Berger calls them 'legitimations') that, when externalized, form the legitimate beliefs of a group (Berger

[13] These are briefly considered in §1.2.1.1 with reference to Dandelion's notion of 'the culture of silence'. (2008a:22)

2011a:6-8;29). If these externalized 'legitimations' have enough communal agreement – enough social cohesion – they start to be seen as incontrovertible. They gain what Berger terms a 'plausibility structure' and the beliefs become viewed as objective knowledge, i.e. carrying a stronger sense of legitimacy (2011a:45). According to Berger this socially gained 'objectivity' then reverts, influencing the 'internal' experiences and beliefs of individuals (within the group). This reaffirms them in a positive feedback loop, strengthening the group's social cohesion/coherence and the perceived legitimacy of their beliefs (2011a:14-5). In *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (2011a), Berger frames religions as paramount examples of this type of legitimacy–cohesion nexus: 'Religion has been the historically most widespread and effective instrumentality of legitimation' (2011a:32).

In *The Sacred Canopy* Berger subscribed to the secularisation thesis, advocating that modernity militated against religion. He believed that factors such as the modern shift towards a more individualistic view of religion, along with the rise of religious pluralism, acted to continually weaken the plausibility structures of religious systems (2011a:130), meaning that religious legitimations would lose their socially constructed impression of objectivity and become viewed as privatised subjective beliefs. However, he later conceded that the process of secularisation was not prevalent, saying that the majority of the world seemed 'as furiously religious as it ever was' (Berger, 1999:2; Berger et al., 2008:10). However, he maintained his concept of the 'sacred canopy' of a legitimacy–cohesion nexus. He argued that religions keep their plausibility structures intact by choosing to erect boundaries and ignore the implications of modernity (2008:14). This is a type of boundary-

guarding tactic that plausibly motivates and typifies the developments seen in conservative and/or fundamentalist religious groups.

However, considering the permissiveness of Liberal Quakers, it seems that, far from erecting boundaries, they have removed them. In embracing the implications of modernity, they have allowed their sacred canopy (plausibility structure) to break down and their internal theological culture to pluralise. Thus, the later sections of this chapter consider Liberal Quaker developments after the potential modern weakening of plausibility structures. This is in conversation with Campbell's (1978) contentions around new forms of religiosity and the mystic type of religion. In other publications, namely *A Rumor of Angels* (2011b[1969]) and *The Heretical Imperative* (1980), Berger gives the rationale for maintaining his personal religious views in the face of the challenges of modernity. He argues that within modernity individuals still have scope to hold an experiential view of religion. They maintain legitimacy in the face of pluralism by allowing for variance in the way expressions of this (legitimately common) religious experience manifests. This aligns Berger's personal religious views closely with the form of religiosity Campbell delineates via Troeltsch's mystic type and with the characteristic views developed amongst the Quaker universalists (see §1.3.1). However, Berger and Campbell both place this form of religion primarily on the private/individual level. The challenge for Liberal Quakers is to hold the developed affinity for a diversity-accommodating, mystic-type religion in tension with their position as an institutional religious group.

(1.2.1.1) The Culture of Silence and the Form of Silent Worship – An Implicit Boundary

In considering this dynamic of tension in the Liberal Quaker context, it is pertinent to consider whether Liberal Quakers have truly dropped their boundaries, or whether they have more implicit boundary-maintaining mechanisms. One possible implicit boundary mechanism is illustrated by Dandelion's contention that the pluralisation of the Liberal Quaker theology has occurred and has (to an extent) had the weight of its implications marginalised under the 'mask' of 'the culture of silence'. This is connected to the Quaker method of silent worship. However, Dandelion positions this as developing into a wider Quaker culture typified by a 'value for silence … [a] devaluation of language, and … consequent rules governing the breaking of silence with speech' (2008a:22). Relatedly, Dandelion argues that Liberal Quakers have additional mechanisms for maintaining their coherence, in that they operate a 'double culture'. He holds that whilst they have a liberal theological culture, they are more conservative around maintaining their form of silent worship. He posits that they subsequently have implicit rules around how silence is to be broken during Quaker worship – forming what Dandelion terms a 'behavioural creed' (2008a:27). This allows a situation where the role of any discursive form of theology in cohering a sense of Quaker identity has been 'marginalised'. This therefore insulates the group's cohesion from the impact of its theological permissiveness and plurality: 'Orthopraxy creates coherence in a group without orthodoxy' (2008a:33).[14] In light of Berger's conceptualisations, the potential for Quakers to operate rules around valuing silence and behaviour during worship can be understood in terms of Quakers putting up

[14] Further discussed in §2.1.

subtler and more implicit boundaries, still allowing them to ignore the implications of modernity and religious pluralism.

The subsequent chapter (2) considers Dandelion's notions around the behavioural creed and Quaker practice in more detail – particularly how they relate to initiatives Quakers might maintains that, as of the 1995 release of the *Book of Discipline – Quaker Faith and Practice* (*QF&P*) – at least on an institutional level, Liberal Quakers did offer a theological rationale to accommodate their theological pluralism, in line with universalist assumptions. At this point they were not completely marginalising discursive theology in favour of orthopraxy. However, the 'culture of silence' and its consequent rules are pertinent to consider here. To an extent they interrelate with the aforementioned universalist assumptions and how Quakers have previously deployed these to resolve and accommodate points of theological conflict.

(1.3) The Universalism vs. Christocentrism Debate

To understand Liberal Quakerism's development from primarily advocating a Christian mysticism to a more plural mysticism, it is relevant to consider the role of the American Quaker theologian Rufus Jones (1863-1948), the populariser of the interpretation of Quakerism as a mystical religion. His historical and theological work *The Later Periods of Quakerism* includes the statement: 'No other large, organised, historically continuous body

of Christians has yet existed which has been so fundamentally mystical, both in theory and practice, as the Society of Friends' (Jones, 1921:xiii, cited in: Southern, 2010:74). Jones understood mysticism to concern the 'immediate connection of the human soul with God.' (1921:33, cited ibid.). However, as the previous quotation shows, he was happy to describe the Society of Friends as a 'body of Christians'. Jones was present as a panel speaker at the 1895 Manchester Conference (Punshon, 2006:259). Through his contribution there, along with 'his travelling ministry … the fifty-four books he published … [and his] editorship of the *American Friend*', his thought can be seen to have had a significant influence on the founding principles and later development of Liberal Quakerism (2006:260). Like others involved in the inception of Liberal Quakerism, Jones was willing to discuss Liberal Quakers in terms of being a Christian group and the mystical experience as being 'the direct contact of a living Christ with the soul of man' (Jones, in: Punshon, 2006:260). However, as Troeltsch's notion of mystical religion as an organisational antitype suggests (see §1.4.1.2), it seems that Jones' commitment to a personal mystical interpretation of religion led him to suggest a move away from set theological systems, arguably including from a commitment to a Christian framework:

> The vital task and mission of mysticism in all ages, whether exhibited in individuals or in a group movement, like that of the Society of Friends, has been to call men away from theological systems, however sacred, to the fresh and living water to be found in a personal experience of God. (1921:xv, cited in: Southern 2010:86)

The question of whether one had to be Christian to be a Quaker was raised to Jones 'as early as 1930' (Dandelion, 2005:66-67). Moreover, throughout the 20th century the essentialness of Christianity to Quakerism was further destabilised. In 1966, Britain (London) Yearly Meeting 'rejected' membership regulations for 'being too prescriptively Christian'

(2005:66-7). However, the debate came to the fore in Quaker popular discussions later in the century, in the late 1970s and the 1980s. Coming to an effectual resolution – one endorsed on an organizational level – with the revision of the Britain Yearly Meeting's *Book of Discipline* in 1994, most notably with the inclusion of excerpts 27.03 and 27.04, which advocate inclusiveness towards 'universalist' views (*QF&P*, 2013).

Here a note should be made about whether George Fox's diary and teachings could play a potential role in providing Liberal Quakers with a basis for building a common group identity. In this regard the thesis follows previous arguments made in the field of Quaker Studies concerning how the inception of Liberal Quakerism constitutes a significant break with the teachings of early Quakerism (Davie, 1997; Dandelion 2005:66-67). Thus, the thesis takes the 1895 Manchester Conference as the key starting point for understanding the developments and current dynamics of Liberal Quakerism that make up the focus of the thesis's investigations. Additionally, the outputs of Quaker nontheists examined by the thesis do not pay special attention to or exhibit substantive conformity around Fox's teachings.[15] For this reason, the argument of the thesis does not engage extensively with the teachings of Fox or early Quakerism.

Initially the debate concerning the relation between Christianity and the Liberal Quaker identity was commonly (internally) framed as a binary between two camps: universalists and Christocentric Quakers. The former group viewed the primary Liberal Quaker religious

[15] See Chapters 3–5.

experience as something accessible and expressible in a variety of ways. The latter contended that, to be considered authentically Quaker, it should be understood in Christian terms. Janet Scott described this divide in the opening of her influential 1980 Swarthmore Lecture[16] *What Canst Thou Say?: Towards a Quaker Theology*:

> … at the heart of Quaker theology there is an important, indeed a crucial, problem that has never been solved … This problem is the tension between two basic beliefs, Christianity and Universalism, the belief on the one hand, that the Inner Light is the light of Christ, and, on the other hand, that it is in everyone whether or not they have heard of Jesus. (Scott, 1980:8)

However, Dandelion notes in his doctoral work that this binary is an oversimplification, instead advocating a 'pluralistic paradigm' (1996:xv) where belief has become so individualised and pluralised that: 'Two fields of belief, separated by a ravine, visible only from above are translated into thousands' (1996:289).[17] The concern of this chapter, however, is not to explore the full diversification of popular Quaker belief, but to examine the way in which universalist assumptions have come to perform an accommodating function for Liberal Quakerism's initial theological pluralisation – a function performed alongside its recognition on an institutional level, by which it has provisionally achieved a loose status as Quaker 'orthodoxy'. It therefore also seems apt to consider how this issue was framed and discussed in the popular group literature, such as Scott's Swarthmore Lecture, rather than considering more fully the diversity of views on an individual level.

[16] The Swarthmore Lectures are a series of lectures initiated in 1908 and given annually at Britain Yearly Meeting. The lectures' stated purposes are 'to interpret to Quakers their message and mission, and to make the wider public aware of the spirit, the aims and fundamental principles of Friends' ('Swarthmore Lecture | Woodbrooke Quaker Conference Centre,' 2017). Whilst not codified on an institutional level, the lectures play a key and influential role in the life and views of the Society.

[17] This issue of further diversification and how it has impacted upon Dandelion's academic formulations around Quaker dynamics and/or coherence is explored more extensively in §2.1.

To better understand the nature of these universalist assumptions and how they developed to take on this accommodating function, it is necessary to explore the development of the Quaker Universalist Group (QUG) and the typical (albeit not unanimous) assumptions they developed concerning the relationship between the Quaker religious experience and its expression in language.

(1.3.1) Quaker Universalism – The QUG and Accommodating Universalist Assumptions

The QUG was first established in 1978 and has gone on to become a listed informal group of Britain Yearly Meeting. The parallel organisation for American Liberal Quakers, 'the Quaker Universalist Fellowship was founded in 1983 by a group of concerned Quakers … interested in the experience of the Quaker Universalist Group' ('History and background,' n.d). The views of John Linton were instigative in the formation of the QUG. QUG's website identifies Linton's *Quakerism as a Forerunner* (2004 [1977]) as leading 'directly' to the establishment of the group ('Pamphlets – Quaker Universalist Group – UK,' n.d.). Linton's outlook was greatly informed by his 'experiences in India of meetings where Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians worshipped together in Quaker silence' (Nesbitt, 2010). Thus, the QUG originated with a concern to broaden the conception of the Quaker religious experience and the religious truth it contained, to include a theological pluralism that extended beyond the Christian framework.

In *Quakerism as a Forerunner* Linton does recognise that, as indicated above, the question of how essential Christianity was to Quakerism has previously been raised within the Society. However, the marked shift he advocates is that a Christian framework should no longer take predominance in Liberal Quakerism organisational identity but rather they should embrace an identity as a post-Christian, universalist group. He could be seen as constructing a candidate neo-orthodoxy revolving around the group's being pluralistic and universalist:

> I shall … argue not merely that the Society should admit such people as a fringe element of 'second-class members' (which is what they feel at present); but that it should widen its own basis and give up its claim to be a specifically Christian organisation. I think this should be done not just as a matter of expediency, but in the pursuit of Truth, because I believe the Truth is wider than Christianity. (Linton, 2004:1)

Owing to his experiences in India, Linton frames this pluralism with reference to Hinduism, saying that:

> Quakerism should abandon its claim to be part of the Christian church, and move towards a universalist position. It should take the line of Hinduism that Truth can be approached from many quarters. (Linton, 2004:3)

However, other outputs from Quaker universalists have stressed that their position is in continuity with the principles and beliefs of Quakerism, especially the Liberal form. Crucially, they showcase a commitment to the Quaker religious experience and the 'mystical' elements of Quakerism. In his piece 'Universal Quakerism' (1983), Ralph Hetherington opens by saying:

> There continues to be some misunderstanding as to what universalist Quakers are saying and a widespread fear that they are trying 'to change the Society' … a universalist view is, in fact, an essential ingredient in Quakerism. Thus no change in the nature of the Society of Friends is being advocated, but rather a clearer understanding of the implications of the mystical basis of Quakerism. (Hetherington, 1983:1)

Quaker academic Rhiannon Grant has noted that this appeal to 'the mystical basis of Quakerism' indicates a reference back to the work of Jones on Quakerism as a mystical religion (2014:173). Furthermore, whilst Linton frames his argument as a shift away from Quakerism's primarily Christian identity, he still affirms a commitment to a mystical religion, saying: 'The weeding out of irrational dogmas, however, does not in my view mean adopting a rationalist position. I believe in mystical religion.' (2004:6)

There is, however, a question of what Linton means when he speaks of 'mystical religion'. Insight into his understanding can be gained via the fact that he contrasts 'mystical religion' with what he terms 'a rationalist position'. In what Linton has to say about rationalist positions elsewhere in his piece, he equates them with a view that sees religion as man-made:

> Let us see then what the humanists and rationalists have to say about religion. They regard it as an attempt to answer moral and intellectual questions of a given time or place. But religion is essentially man-made, they argue, and theology … the product of the human imagination. There is however something called religious humanism which gives a place to man's mystical experience. The claim of religious devotees to have had an experience of the presence of Christ or the Buddha can be understood as a yearning after righteousness. (2004:5)

Significantly for the thesis' later consideration of Quaker nontheism, Linton suggests that there is a place in Quakerism for religious humanism within a universalist understanding. Indeed, the nontheist David Boulton has highlighted this in justifying nontheism's place within Quakerism (2012:4).[18] However, a noteworthy point here is that the quotation above seems to suggest that religious humanism can be incorporated if it includes a view of 'experience' or a 'yearning' that relates to a phenomenon that is beyond the 'rationalist position' and the 'man-made'. He affirms this in the subsequent paragraph, again with reference to Eastern religion:

> … one can learn from Eastern thought. The Eastern view is that there is more to life than logic. Rationalism is just a phenomenon of Western man's mental processes, and is not to be taken too seriously. (2004:5)

Linked to this, Linton suggests that those who understand mystical experience within a humanist context, e.g. 'as a yearning righteousness', should understand descriptions framed in more traditional religious language as attempts to give expression to the same common experience.

This signifies a crucial element of the typical universalist assumptions concerning the relationship between experience and its linguistic expression. This has allowed such assumptions to play an accommodating role to the theological diversity within the Liberal Quaker group. These assumptions are quite neatly summarised by Grant (2014) in her thesis on Quaker language use.

[18] This issue and the ways in which some views espoused under the label 'nontheism' (itself an umbrella term incorporating a diversity of views) push beyond the universalist framework is discussed further in §3.4.

Grant delineates Quaker universalists (and indeed now Liberal Quakers in general) as typically relying upon three interrelated assumptions concerning the relation between religious experience and its linguistic expression. She denotes to these assumptions as: (1) the 'experience-first' assumption; (2) the 'unity-of-religious-experience' assumption; (3) the 'ineffability-of-religious-experience' assumption (2014:37-38). The first of these is the assumption that one first has an experience and then applies words in order to describe that experience. The process is seen to be somewhat 'inadequate', with some of the quality of the experience being lost in the act of linguistic communication. The second is the assumption that religious experiences have a common origin, that, regardless of the words or frameworks individuals use to describe their experience, they are essentially talking about the same phenomena on the level of experience. The third is the assumption that the religious experience is ultimately ineffable and can never be adequately described in words (ibid.). This third assumption, as Grant points out, is often linked to the first one concerning experience being 'pre-linguistic'. However, the third is also often employed to explain the diversity of religious expressions and traditions allegedly stemming from a universal experience, this pluralism being taken as both a consequence and indicative of the experience's ineffability (ibid.).

Philosophical concerns may be raised regarding how one can have insufficient clarity of access to the phenomenological content of the religious experience to give it adequate expression but sufficient access to detect that multiple subjects are describing a common experience. However, this line of enquiry is not a primary concern of this thesis. The scope of this project is to consider how Quaker thought around a coherent theology and identity

has developed in the light of the theological diversity and points of conflict that exist within the group. To this end, Quaker universalists in particular (Grant, 2014:40) can be seen to have relied upon the type of assumptions Grant delineates to offer a theological rationale for accommodating the diversity and potential points of theological tension – justifying the production of theological pluralism.

To an extent the validity of Grant's analysis can be seen in the quotations cited above. Linton's claim that 'Truth can be approached from many quarters' is suggestive of both the 'experience-first' and the 'the 'unity-of-religious-experience' assumption It indicates both that this religious Truth is primary and that it is in a sense universal (Grant, 2014:37). His suggestion that religious humanists should understand talk about the 'presence of Christ or the Buddha' as a 'yearning after righteousness' seems to especially reflect the 'unity-of-religious-experience' assumption: the idea that it is acceptable to understand others as speaking from/of an experience of common origin in spite of what might appear to be very different forms of linguistic expression or even ideological/theological framework. Grant, however, employs an outlook promoted by John Lampen in his pamphlet 'Quaker Experience and Language' to demonstrate these assumptions and the resultant dynamics within the typical framework of Quaker universalism:

> 1. There is something more in reality than whatever we can perceive with our senses and measure or hold in our minds.
> 2. This 'something more' is not merely the object of belief; it is experienced by the individual as a presence — and an absence. Some of us experience it as an encounter with something personal. It is not simply an individual experience since we can also meet it as a group.
> 3. We believe that all people have the potential for this experience.

> 4. This is the experience which has been given such names as ‘God’, ‘The Light’, ‘The Tao’, ‘The Inward Christ’, ‘The Spirit’, and ‘that of God in everyone’. It is not the naming which is important but the experience.
> 5. The heart of worship is the desire and attempt to experience this presence.
> 6. The ‘something more’ is essentially indescribable. Theologies, at best, can only point towards it; but they can be helpful, even essential, to some of us, while unnecessary for others. So tolerance should be the rule in religious discussion, and there is nothing incongruous in people worshipping together who have wildly differing belief-systems, if they are trying to experience together the reality which underpins all creeds and honest seeking.
> (Lampen n.d:6, cited in: Grant 2014:38)

Lampen is placing religious experience as ‘something more in reality’ and certainly prior to and beyond attempts at linguistic expression, speaking to the (1) experience-first and (3) ineffability assumptions. Point 6, concerning the ‘essentially indescribable’ nature of the experience, can especially be aligned with the third assumption. Lampen also speaks of this ‘something more’ experience as a singular experience, rather than there being multiple different experiences that may be expressed as religious or mystical experiences, or which underlie different religious traditions. In point 4 he affirms that differently worded expressions are indeed speaking to this same, assumed-to-be common/universal experience: ‘It is not the naming which is important but the experience.’ This gives an implicit theological rationale for both accommodating and producing theological pluralism. It is the contention of this chapter that following the universalism vs. Christocentricism debate and the 1985–1994 revision of the *Book of Discipline*, these assumptions, and the accommodating theological rationale, received institutional recognition and have been increasingly typically employed throughout the Liberal Quaker group to both understand and resolve points of theological diversity and potential conflict (*QF&P,* 2013; Plüss, 2007).

(1.3.2) Janet Scott, Social Values and the Liberal Quaker Identity

§1.3.3 will consider how these assumptions came to take the place of 'Quaker orthodoxy' and explores the dynamics of how they operate as said 'orthodoxy'. However, it is worth noting first that, whilst this theological rationale emerged to prominence following the universalism vs. Christocentricism debate, there were other framings of the Quaker identity seeking to resolve the points of theological tension within the group. Some of these suggest the potential for divergence from the positioning of a universal religious experience as the core of Liberal Quaker theology and/or identity. Therefore, they have an impact on the later developments and dynamics of Liberal Quakerism as explored in the later chapters and so are worth considering here.

In her 1980 Swarthmore Lecture Janet Scott demonstrates some of the same sensibilities as those informing the typical universalist assumptions examined above: namely, that differences in linguistic expression, naming or labelling are not essential to what is common to Liberal Quakers. In directly answering the question of whether it is essential to be Christian to be Quaker, Scott says:

> … we may answer the question 'Are Quakers Christian?' by saying that it does not matter. What matters to Quakers is not the label by which we are called or call ourselves, but the life. (Scott, 1980:70)

However, Scott's claim that 'What matters to Quakers is … the life' (although it is not quite clear what she meant by this) rather than a mystical or religious experience implies a subtle

but important difference: it suggests that the idea of a mystical religious experience or any theological rationale may be redundant as a basis for the Quaker identity, and that Quakers may rather move to basing their common identity primarily around their social values. The Society has a record of often adopting 'tolerant' and 'progressive' political stances, in the form of 'Testimonies',[19] which do to an extent (tangentially) act as identity markers for Quakers as a group. Prime examples of this would be pacifism and the 'Testimony for Peace', and the early advocating of tolerance for homosexuality as a healthy expression of sexuality, as seen in the publication *Towards a Quaker View of Sex* (Heron, 1963). It is difficult, however, to see how Quakers can adopt these stances as the *primary* basis for their identity without reducing themselves to a role as a political advocacy group, thus diminishing their position as a religious society and their distinctiveness from other such organisations.

Indeed, it is Scott's lecture that Davie specifically identifies as epitomising British Quaker theological 'trends' in diversifying and diverging away from the teachings of the early Quakers. In his eyes this signifies the move of Quakerism away from a liberal theological position to a radical one (1997:317) – in other words, from a group that still based itself around a common religious experience grounded in an ultimately Christian theology to one that in its values and 'theology' explicitly encouraged continual progress and change (1997:314). In Davie's view this did open the way for Quakerism and theology to be further de-structured – one might say secularised – to the point where it is simply concerned with social values and political advocacy.

[19] Discussed further in §4.3.

Given the recent increased visibility of and discussion over Quaker nontheism, it seems Davie was astute in his view of Liberal Quakerism's future development. The development also shows how a group may shift from a theological position which emphasises a mystical personal experience to a less theological position. However, whilst Davie positions Scott as a key point of instigation for what he views as more radical tendencies, the extent to which Scott was advocating an abandonment of a mystical basis for Quakerism is questionable. It is not quite clear what she meant by the Quaker life; immediately following her claim about 'the life' as a basis for Quaker identity she goes on to say:

> The abandonment of self to God means also the abandonment of labels, of doctrines, of cherished ways of expressing truth. It means a willingness to follow the Spirit wherever it leads ... (1980:70)

Therefore, whilst the first quotation from her lecture may be open to alternative interpretations and possible shifts, Scott still framed the Quaker 'life' in mystical or theistic terms: a life informed by '[t]he abandonment of self to God' or an inclination to 'follow the Spirit'. Linked to this, the next section of this thesis demonstrates that since the mid-1990s Liberal Quakers have broadly – at least on an institutional level – looked to accommodate their theological diversity via a mystical and/or theological rationale in line with universalist assumptions.

The emergence of nontheism may suggest that the breadth of Liberal Quaker diversity extends beyond this theological rationale or formulation of 'Quaker orthodoxy'. This gives credence to Davie's view on the group's development. However, that Quakers are explicitly discussing the phenomena suggests that the dynamics of Liberal Quaker development are more engaged and complex than Davie suggests. At the very least, Liberal Quakerism's

development into a radical (or hyper-liberal) context involves thicker permutations and discursive/semiotic formulations than the scope of Davie's analysis is able to represent. Such permutations may be usefully framed and analysed as alternative new forms of religiosity rather than being glazed over as part of a linear structural breakdown of a religious group.[20]

(1.3.3) The 1994 Revision and Accommodating Universalist Assumptions

Concerning the adoption of universalist-type assumptions as 'orthodoxy' within the 1994 Revision of the *Book of Discipline (Quaker Faith and Practice)*, the introduction to the first section– 'advices & queries' – states:

> Within the community there is a diversity of gifts … There will also be diversity of experience, of belief and of language. Friends maintain that expressions of faith must be related to personal experience. Some find traditional Christian language full of meaning; some do not. Our understanding of our own religious tradition may sometimes be enhanced by insights of other faiths. The deeper realities of our faith are beyond precise verbal formulation and our way of worship based on silent waiting testifies to this. (*QF&P* 2013:1.01)

This extract demonstrates an affinity for the universalist view, that Quaker religious experience is in some sense located outside of and/or beyond linguistic expressions. Moreover, it suggests that language outside of the Christian tradition can validly be used to express the Quaker faith and diverse expressions can still be viewed as expressions of the same faith.

[20] This point is discussed further in §1.4.1.2.

Perhaps a starker demonstration of the validation of the universalist position within the 1994 Revision can be seen in the entry in Chapter 27 (on 'unity and diversity') specifically written the year of the revision:

> It has become quite customary to distinguish between 'Christians' and 'universalists' as if one category excluded the other … This situation has led many Friends to suppose that universalist Friends are in some way set over against Christocentric Friends. This is certainly not the case. Universalism is by definition inclusivist, and its adherents accept the right to free expression of all points of view, Christocentric or any other. Indeed, in London Yearly Meeting there are many universalists whose spiritual imagery and belief are thoroughly Christocentric …
>
> From the beginning the Quaker Christian faith has had a universalist dimension. George Fox … pointed out … individuals who lived before the Christian era or outside Christendom … had responded to the divine principle within them. In these terms, all Quaker Christians are universalists. Obedience to the Light within, however that may be described, is the real test of faithful living. (*QF&P* 2013:27.04)

Whilst the entry is careful to link the universalist position with traditional Quaker and Christian positions and affirms that those Christocentric Quakers who prefer Christian language are included within a universalist framework, there is an affirmation that expressions of the Quaker faith are valid 'however … [they] may be described'. The 'test' is taken to be whether they are in line with 'the Light within', which refers to the personal Quaker religious experience. This essentially amounts to a confirmation of the universalist position, as Christian language, whilst referenced, is no longer taken as essential or necessary to a legitimate expression of the Quaker religious experience or the Quaker faith.

The picture is, however, more complex than this extract suggests. There are other entries that look to affirm a place for more Christocentric positions. One of these, 26.43, is cross-referenced immediately after 27.04, and posits that the 'coherence and unity of Quakerism'

comes from universalist and Christ-centred understandings of the religious experience being 'held firmly together':

> The heart of the Quaker message [lies] … in an experience … known in our hearts and also related to the structure of the universe; also known individually and recognised as belonging to all. At the same time this universal spirit is focused and made personal in Jesus in a way which makes it appropriate to speak of the Universal Light as the Light of Christ. It is from this double emphasis on universal and Christ-like that the Quaker message starts. It is these two elements, held firmly together, which provide the coherence and unity of Quakerism. (*QF&P* 2013:26.43)

However, other entries, notably 27.04, do not indicate a requirement that Quakers hold universalist and Christocentric framings of the experience 'firmly together'. Rather, they suggest that it is permissible for Quakers to hold a universalist position that leaves space for Christian expressions of the Quaker faith within that framework. The complete scope of 'Quaker orthodoxy' allowed for in the *Book of Discipline* includes post-Christian positions and aligns itself with universalist assumptions.

To add another level of complication, the entries in the chapters on 'meeting for worship' and 'church affairs' stress the importance of respecting others' differences in opinion and belief on an individual level:

> Do you maintain a respect for others as persons however strongly you may differ from their opinions? (2013:2.86)
>
> What is required is a willingness to listen to what others have to say rather than persuade them that one's own point of view is right and proper. (2013:2.90)
>
> Individuals and groups must be careful not to claim to speak for Friends without explicit authority. (2013:3.27)

Plüss understands this tendency not to place any individual views as paramount as signifying a type of 'epistemological collectivism', saying that:

> Quaker belief is characterized by the way it enshrines a normative cognitive orientation which advocates that content items of Quaker belief have a non-authoritative status, or cannot be considered as ultimate truth. (Plüss, 1995:111)

Drawing upon this, Dandelion claims that Quakers operate 'a sense of absolute perhaps', where individual belief claims have to be made with a sense of 'perhapsness' (Dandelion, 2004:225).[21] It is, however, open to question how far this respect for difference or perhapsness extends: whether it entails Quakers simply allowing for expressions of e.g. universalism and Christocentricism with no underlying theological rationale connecting the two, or whether the respect for differences entails the favouring of an accommodating rationale such as that offered by universalist positions. Indeed, Dandelion does indicate that the perhapness is applied to expressions of the religious experience rather than beliefs about the religious experience itself, saying: 'It is as if Quakers say from outside their religious experience that they can never find a certainty of truth claims to match the experience itself' (Dandelion, 2004:224). This places his conception of Quaker perhapsness closer to one accommodated by universalist assumptions. Furthermore, in her later work on Quakerism in 2007, discussed below, the examples Plüss gives of how Quakers conceptualise and resolve points of theological conflict may be related to universalist assumptions. These assumptions can also be seen as typically underlying expressions of Quaker belief in popular internal literature outside of the QUG – adding support to the legitimacy and utility of understanding them to be functioning as a loose 'Quaker orthodoxy'. However, the framing of Liberal Quakers as being orientated to a type of

[21] Discussed further in §2.1.

perhapsness suggests how the types of views within the group's diverse theological culture may develop and pressurise the universalist accommodation. This is a development the thesis posits to be now occurring and explores further in subsequent chapters.

Up until the present issues started to emerge, however – primarily, those concerning nontheism – universalist assumptions can be seen to have become fairly typical outside of the QUG and within Liberal Quakerism more broadly. Indications towards them can be found scattered throughout the popular internal literature of Liberal Quakerism. In one of Dandelion's publications, *Celebrating the Quaker Way* (2010), where he writes internally as a Liberal Quaker (as opposed to an academic sociologist) he advises that, while he predominantly uses traditional Quaker language, his readership should try to 'translate' or 'hear where the words come from'. Implicit in this is an assumption that such a translation is possible: that, despite displaying preferences for different forms of expression, Liberal Quakers can still understand each other and where they are coming from; they are involved in a common religious endeavour and/or speaking to a common religious experience. The prominent Quaker commentator Rex Ambler places the religious experience as 'mysterious and finally inexpressible common ground' (Ambler, 1994:29), thus aligning himself with the assumptions concerning the 'unity of experience' and ineffability. This notion of the religious experience as 'common ground' clearly highlights the accommodating bent of this set of assumptions, especially when various divergent expressions are tied to that common ground, signifying a loose sense of 'orthodoxy'.

It is notable that at the beginning of her thesis Grant places the assumptions she delineates as typical among Liberal Quakers more broadly, although she notes that they are

particularly prominent and 'relied upon' by those Quakers who explicitly identify as universalists (2014:40). Significantly, she also notes that a universalist position in some senses may act as a loose or implicit Quaker doctrine:

> Although the Friends involved would rightly deny that their universalist position was a Quaker doctrine (because nothing can have the status of a doctrine within Quakerism), it can nevertheless be thought of as taking the kind of second-order role which Lindbeck … ascribes to doctrines – in other words, it tells you what kinds of things can correctly be said within the language-game at hand…
>
> …these 'doctrinal' claims are generally implicit and not discussed as such. Rather, they are taken as self-evident by most writers, and even those who disagree often struggle to articulate them. (Grant 2014:178)

Grant's work on Quaker language use draws heavily on the work of Lindbeck and the notion that religions may be understood as functioning analogously to a language (2014:120). Grant contends that Quakers do still operate certain grammatical-type rules in the way they express their beliefs, even if they may allow for a certain extent of theological diversity: '… [there are] some underlying rules, or at least guidelines, which Friends follow when they engage in this list-making language-game, even if they themselves would deny that' (2014:129). Grant's conceptualisation of Liberal Quaker language use allows a potential route to understanding Liberal Quaker coherence mechanisms, which is without reference to common belief claims, but rather via the internal self-contained coherence of the grammar and/or logic of Quakerism/Quaker language use. However, her suggestion that a universalist position may act as implicit doctrine is indicative that in her view, whilst not necessary, the underlying rules are still tied to a theological rationale. That rationale is the theological supposition that, despite the diversity of the expressions of belief, they are still expressions of the same common religious experience. In line with this implicit doctrine is the suggestion that expressions of Quaker belief should not challenge the accommodating

belief that Quakers are engaging with – are trying to give expression to – a common religious experience.

Plüss makes similar observations in her analysis of how Quakers seek to resolve points of theological conflict, referring to the assumption of a 'shared experience' or a 'mystical' basis for the religion, along with notions that language may be inadequate for expressing the experiences and/or internal senses of meaning to which individual Quakers are trying to give voice:

> Participant observation reveals that if a group participant expresses an opinion that strongly contradicts group values, another participant … will try to reaffirm them … formulating a link between the dissenting opinion and the larger consensus, so that the dissenting opinion can be integrated into it. For example, Friends rationalized the emergence of conflicting views in the Society over whether or not Quakers are Christians by emphasizing that Friends participating in this dispute all agree that the Quaker worship method is mystical. If a link between dissenting opinions and group consensus cannot be established the significance of the controversial opinion may be reinterpreted altogether … Friends may interpret their theological differences by emphasizing that these differences arise from the fact that Friends use the same words, but give different meanings to them, implying that words are inadequate to express what is believed to be a shared experience. (2007:265)

The formulation at the end frames Quaker conceptualisations around the relationship between experience and language somewhat differently from the universalist assumptions presented by Grant; according to Plüss, Quakers may also understand tensions as arising from the same words being used with different meanings, rather than different words being used to express a common experience. An example of such a move might be to say that, when Linton states: 'Quakerism should abandon its claim to be part of the Christian church' (2004:3), he is not saying that Quakers cannot use Christian language to express their religion, but rather that Christian language is not its only legitimate expression. Similarly,

the move may be seen in Linton's own claims that religious humanists are not necessarily evoking humanism as a denial of mystical religion (2004:5). Significantly, however, both the examples Plüss gives still contain an invocation of 'a shared experience' or a 'mystical' basis to the Quaker religion. In other words, an accommodating theological rationale is still being invoked, which can be understood as incorporative of diverse expressions of the Liberal Quaker religion. Indeed, Plüss suggests that she is in agreement with one of this chapter's central contentions, that Quakerism's pluralisation and the subsequent internal question about the essentialness of Christianity to Quakerism was largely resolved via an affirmation of this mystical basis.

Plüss' claims concerning how Quakers typically attempt to formulate links, affirm and incorporate dissenting opinions are significant to the consideration of the group's later developments, i.e. further (a)theological diversification and nontheism. Given that Plüss is discussing typical Quaker responses to conflicting or dissenting views (in general), it stands to reason that these attitudes would be applied even to those views that pressure and push beyond the accommodating universalist assumptions themselves.

Plüss' suggestion that Quakers may move to completely reinterpret controversial opinions, and the interpretation that Quaker expressions are speaking to the same shared mystical experience, may also be seen to have resonances with Dandelion's notion of the 'culture of silence' (Dandelion, 2008a:22). Certainly, both make appeals to the inadequacy of language. Both also maintain an assumption of unity amongst Liberal Quakers by controlling the extent to which individuals can frame themselves as dissenting from group consensus. Such a move can be understood as a form of silencing, or (in line with Berger see §1.2.1) putting

up boundaries that ignore the true implications of modern 'religious' pluralism. However, Dandelion frames the 'culture of silence' as marginalising the role of discursive theology in characterising the Quaker identity. Universalist assumptions offer a potential accommodating theological rationale concerning the unity of the Quaker religious experience. Such a route seemingly does not fully marginalise the role of discursive theological belief in the formulation of a common Quaker identity. Plüss' analysis of Liberal Quaker dynamics leaves space for the consensus of the group to be understood via a non-linguistic and/or non-theological framework. However, the examples she gives of how Quakers approach accommodating dissenting views make reference to the theological rationale of their being a common 'mystical' or 'shared experience'.

It may therefore be said such a theological rationale and the loose universalist assumptions that inform it: (1) achieved some institutional recognition in the 1994 revision of the *Book of Discipline*; (2) can be found as typical across the internal popular Quaker literature c.1980–2010; and (3) have operated to resolve theological conflict and frame Quakers' expressions of their belief.

Thus, the present thesis takes it as reasonable to understand such a theological rationale as based around discussed universalist-type assumptions as having held the position of 'Quaker orthodoxy', at least as codified in the 1994 revision of the *Book of Discipline*. This is important to the thesis' consideration of current and later developments and dynamics within the Liberal Quaker group: its further theological diversification; the internal debate over the emergence and place of Quaker nontheism; and the constructions of alternative new forms of religiosity and neo-orthodox candidates ahead of the forthcoming new

revision of the *Book of Discipline*. To understand the current dynamics and emerging views within Liberal Quakerism around questions of their common identity and/or theology/orthodoxy, one must understand why developments since the 1990s have placed pressure on the accommodating function of the implicit 'orthodoxy' offered by such universalist assumptions.

(1.4) Quakerism's Social Type: Mystical Religion

This section brings in sociological formulations from Ernest Troeltsch (1992) and Colin Campell (1978) in order to consider ways in which Quakerism has historically developed and negotiated its organisational structure and orientation in relation to wider society. This is relevant as it has implications for how Quakers have sought to understand and orientate their coherence and definitive structure as a movement. It also has implications for why Liberal Quakerism may be particularly susceptible to the theological diversification and fragmentation that has arguably characterised the group's development.

Early Quakerism, in terms of its organisational structure and orientation with wider society, could be understood as what Ernest Troeltsch delineated as a sect-type religion. Partially building on the work of Max Weber, Troeltsch demarcated a set of ideal social types, seeking to classify the manner in which religions organise themselves and orientate themselves in relation to wider society. In the broader field of sociology, Troeltsch's Church type and sect type have been the most widely used as conceptual tools (Campbell, 1978:147). Troeltsch defined sect-type religions as those typically formed on the margins of society, often in protest to the institutions of the state and/or established Church.

Membership of sects is seen as typically volitional, with these type of groups defining and organising themselves with reference to the control they operate over the inner lives of their members, generally promoting enthusiasm and/or moral obedience (1992:331-343). Troeltsch contrasted sect-type religions with the concept of Church-type religions. A Church-type religion is one that attempts to place itself at the centre of a society; typically, being accepted by or working complicitly with secular-state powers. The Church type aims towards universality, making claims to having absolute truth and aspiring for a monopoly over believers, whereby all individuals in a society are members. It organises itself primarily through structural institutions such as sacraments and a professional priesthood (ibid).

The sociological work of Niebuhr (1975 [1929]) added the third type of 'denomination', which can be placed on a continuum between the Church and sect types. Like Church-type religions, denominations are accepted by secular-state and mainstream society. However, they do not operate a monopoly over believers within that society, rather existing amongst a plurality of other denominations. Like the sect-type religions, membership of denominations is broadly volitional.

Historically, studies using the Church/denomination/sect typology have often focused on the process of how certain religious groups develop into or between these defined types. This process was the focus of many of the earliest ventures into the sociological study of the organisation and development of Quakerism, notably the works of Richard Vann (1969), Richard Bauman ([1983] 2008) and Elizabeth Isichei (1964), which respectively gave delineations of Quakerism's initial development into a sect-type religion (Vann, 1969; Bauman, 2008) and its later move towards a more denominational form (Isichei, 1964). The

understanding of early Quakerism as a sect makes sense given the proscriptions around, for example clothing and endogamy, and its position as marginal and/or non-conformist relative to mainstream society (§1.1). The breakdown of these proscriptions and Quakerism's move towards societal acceptance – without taking the place of a universal church – may be understood as a process of denominalisation.

However, Dandelion notes that this earlier focus on 'the place of the Quaker group in the Church/denomination/sect typology … limited the construction of a more complete picture of the Quaker group' (1996:3). He also notes that the results of his doctoral research, in investigating a more complete picture, challenge the contention that Liberal Quakers can be easily fitted into one of these 'ideal types'. He suggests that if applications of the typology remain too one-dimensional, the typology may find itself 'bankrupt' in light of the developing complexities of religious groups such as the Quakers (1996:3;125-6).

(1.4.1) Mystic-Type Religion

Dandelion is right to suggest that the Church/denomination/sect typology may be inadequate for capturing the detailed internal dynamics of religious groups – especially a theologically diverse group like the Liberal Quakers. However, as Colin Campbell notes in his article 'The Secret Religion of the Educated Classes' (1978), sociologists have typically neglected the fact that Troeltsch formulated another religious type – that of a mystical and spiritual religion. Campbell contends – as does, later, Wade C. Roof (1998) – that this type is particularly conceptually useful for understanding developments in peoples' religious belief and new religious movements (NRMs) within modern societal contexts. Moreover, Campbell

contends that the individualistic bent of this mystic type of religion makes it especially appealing alongside a modern valuing of individualism and scepticism, particularly amongst the 'educated classes':

> Sect and church religion he regarded as fundamentally vulnerable in the face of the skepticism and relativism that characterized the ethos of an individualistic, urban civilization and must inevitably be on the defensive. Spiritual and mystic religion, however, was not incompatible with this ethos, but, on the contrary, had a basic affinity with the idealistic and aesthetic individualism that was a feature of the educated classes. (1978: 155)

Here, Campbell is following the views on religious development expressed by Troeltsch, who said that: 'in general … the modern educated classes understand nothing but mysticism' (1992:798), and that: 'gradually, in the modern world of educated people, the third [mystic] type has come to predominate' (1992:983). However, Campbell's argument is that this formulation of mystic religion should be utilised more as a framework for academic approaches to understanding the 'rise of the new religiosity'. In his view this happens alongside 'the decline of church religion' in modern society (1978:151).

Troeltsch actually presented two conceptualisations of the role played by mysticism in religious systems – a 'wider' one and a 'narrower' one (1992:734). In the wider sense he described mysticism as a component in religion entailing 'merely the insistence on the direct inward and present religious experience' (1992:730). He held that such a concept of mysticism can be found in all manifestations of religion, saying that 'in all religious systems in … varied forms, mysticism is a universal phenomenon' (1931:732). This does not necessarily entail a contention that all religious experiences have a unified experiential origin, but rather that all social manifestations of religion develop from a basis in inward

experience and/or religiosity. The narrower conceptualisation sees mysticism as properly developing into its own religious type when it starts to position itself as the 'the real universal heart of all religion' (1992:734) or the 'correct interpretation of the religious process' (Campbell 1978:147). In other words, the narrower concept signifies a potential point when mysticism does start to be seen as the common universal core of all religion. One of the phrases Troeltsch uses is that of a belief in the 'unity of the "Divine Ground"' (1992:744).

Campbell holds that this narrow form of mystic-type religion is a conceptually useful tool for understanding the nature of new religious forms emerging in modern society. Primarily this is because it is congenial to the modern valuing of individualism. The focus on personal experience means it is not as susceptible to the modern rational critique of religion or the challenges to more outward and/or overtly organisational religious forms (1978:153-154). Furthermore, Campbell claims that mystic-type religion has another advantage in that it is more adaptable towards tolerating and/or syncretising a plurality of views – a facet he again equates with having an affinity with the modern values of the educated classes (1978:154-155).

The thoughts of Troelstch and Campbell on mystic-type religion as a religion of the modern educated classes seem astute. They are highly resonant with the principles Davie delineates as characteristic of modern liberal theologies in general, including those of Liberal Quakerism; namely, the shift towards understanding religion as principally concerned with the personal immediate experience of God (§1.2). Moreover, the typical universalist assumptions around a common primary experience underlying religious expression seem to reflect Troelstch's characterisation of mystic-type religion as concerned with the 'unity of

the “Divine Ground”’ (1992:744). Additionally, the shift among Liberal Quakers towards a more explicit adoption of these assumptions in order to accommodate theological pluralism reflects Campbell’s characterisation of mystical religion’s appeal as lying in its adaptability towards syncretism and tolerance (1978:154-155).

(1.4.1.1) Mystic-Type Religion in Relation to Liberal Quakerism and Accommodating Universalist Assumptions

Indeed, the mystic-type religion would seem particularly relevant to the Quaker case, although it has also been underused in the field of Quaker Studies. The movement started with a focus on a direct religious experience, and the formation of Liberal Quakerism can be seen as modernising project (Dandelion 2007:129). If one considers Jones as influential on the universalist position within Quakerism – i.e. the previous ‘loose orthodoxy’ – it is notable that Punshon characterises Jones as presenting the interpretation that ‘Quakerism was not a denomination or a sect – it was a spiritual movement’ (2006:257-260), although he does not make explicit reference to Troeltsch’s mystic type in his discussion of Jones.

Furthermore, if mystical religion and associated individualist values are particularly attractive to ‘the educated classes’, it is notable that the 2013 British Quaker Survey found that Liberal British Quakers are an extremely educated group: 71% of respondents ‘had undergraduate degrees with 32% of these a Master’s or doctorate in addition’ (Dandelion, 2014:2). These sensibilities and demographics within Liberal Quakerism can be understood to have been both attracted and exacerbated by Quakerism’s individualist/non-hierarchical(doctrinal)/mystical features, whilst also contributing to the further

development of these very features within the religious group – as seen in the formation of, and further developments within, the Liberal form. An understanding of Troeltsch's and Campbell's formulations around this mystic type of religion is helpful in understanding the inception of, and developments within, Liberal Quakerism which have been the focus of this chapter. Additionally, they lend a framework for understanding the more recent breakdowns, conflicts and developments that have taken place or are now taking place in Liberal Quakerism which are the concern of the subsequent chapters.

It seems apparent that the development of Quaker universalist assumptions resonates with the concept of mystic-type religion. Its focus on mysticism and a common universal religious experience, to the point of accommodating theological pluralism, fits with the idea of mystic religion emerging as its own religious type when it positions the mystical as 'the real universal heart of all religion' or 'the unity of the "Divine Ground"'. In line with Campbell's argument, it operates and has appeal amongst Quakers for its ability to accommodate and tolerate different religious views. However, Troeltsch and Campbell both understand the narrow mystic-type of religion as a radically individualised phenomenon. This is at odds with the concept of Quaker universalist assumptions operating as a loose 'orthodoxy' within a religious group with both traditional and institutional structures. However, the position of Quaker universalist assumptions as a loose orthodoxy may instead be seen as an attempt to operate a mystic-type religion in the narrower sense as an organising/structuring mechanism for an institutional religion. Further examination of Troeltsch's thought on narrowly defined mystic religion helps to clarify why this may lead to inherent tensions, and this may provide elucidation of the current and further dynamics of development (plausibly, de-structuring) of the Liberal Quaker group.

(1.4.1.2) Mystical Religion as De-structuring Anti-Type

Troeltsch contends that mystic-type religion of the narrow kind holds its view of mystical unity irrespective of organisational structures. He even states: 'The active energies in mysticism of this kind can become independent in principle, contrasted with concrete religions' (1992:734). The historical and systematic theologian Johannes Zachhuber emphasises how the narrow mystic type can work to 'undermine' the maintenance of institutional, communal or organisational structures:

> This 'social type' really is an 'antitype' at least as far as intention is concerned. The 'contrarian' mystics question and undermine the very legitimacy of institutional religion itself, which seems the exact opposite of the formation of an alternative organisational pattern … the stricter form of mysticism is 'indifferent' towards religious communities whether or not these 'mystics' then continue with an outward conformity to traditional religious custom within their respective community, or whether they proceed to its complete rejection. (Zachhuber 2016:73)

This characterisation as an undermining 'antitype' in relation to socio-organisational structures clearly illustrates how the experiential and mystical elements of Liberal Quakerism feed into the later development of plurality and permissiveness towards individual belief and the subsequent pressures on socio-institutional coherence structures. Here, it may also be tempting to consider Pilgrim's alternative contention that the pressure towards further diversification and breakdown present in Liberal Quakerism is representative of an internalised 'heterotopic impulse', informed by Quakers' history of nonconformity (2008:55-58; see also §1.1). The history of Quaker non-conformity is indeed important in understanding the present dynamics of Liberal Quakerism. However, as a

starting point one should first consider the role of Quakerism's prioritising experiential (and mystical) elements of religion in informing later developments within the Quaker religion.

Troeltsch makes it clear that he views the mystic type of religion as separate from his formulation of sects in terms of its radical individualism. He argues that this style of religion can foster a disregard for human social relations or more definitive socio-historical and/or ritualistic structures, militating against the formation of a religious community or group:

> Mysticism is a radical individualism very distinct from that of the sect. While the sect separates individuals from the world by its conscious hostility to 'worldliness' and by its ethical severity … mysticism lays no stress at all upon the relation between individuals, but only upon the relations between the soul and God. It regards the historical, authoritative and ritual elements in religion merely as methods of quickening the religious sense with which, in case of need, it can dispense altogether. 'Spiritual religion' in particular, with its intense emphasis on 'first-hand experience', actually tends to sweep away the historical element altogether, and in so doing it eliminates the only centre around which a Christian cult can be formed. Thus this kind of religion becomes non-historical, formless, and purely individualistic … (1992:743)

This speaks to the potential for mystic religion not to sustain religiosity at all, but rather to contribute to the breakdown of any concrete forms. The sociologist Steve Bruce (Bruce, 2013, 2006) – a notable proponent of the secularisation thesis – has argued that these individualised new forms of religion simply represent permutations taking place within the process of secularisation and the decline of religion, claiming that such mystic religion contains 'seeds of its own destruction' (2013:112) and that there will be a continual 'shift to ever-more liberal and tolerant forms of religion and eventually to benign indifference' (2006:38).

Bruce's suggestion is pertinent to the Liberal Quaker case and its transition into a 'liberal-liberal' or 'hyper-liberal' context (Dandelion and Collins, 2008:1,16). Dandelion and Collins suggest that this hyper-liberalism may result in the movement 'prefiguring many of the developments which may overtake currently more conservative groups' (2008:1). This is one of the reasons why studies of the contemporary Liberal Quaker group can be taken as particularly interesting with plausible implications for the wider field of religious studies. The emergence of Quaker nontheism and the fact that it is being seriously discussed within the religious group[22] may be taken to signify the type of shifting towards secularity that Bruce observes. However, if this type of de-structuring, 'secularising' process is taking place within Quakerism, the context may be seen as somewhat different to the process as it may occur on an individual level amongst people in wider society. Instead, it is happening within a group with a history and corporate institutional structures, a group that endeavours to discuss and revise representations of its identity and/or (a)theological culture on an institutional level to better reflect developments on a more popular level – as seen in the generational revision of the *Book of Discipline.*

Significantly, the levels of discussion, engagement and reflection within Liberal Quakerism signify that, even if Liberal Quakerism is undergoing a liberalising, secularising, de-structuring of the kind Bruce delineates, the process itself, and its permutations, are not regarded with 'benign indifference' (Bruce 2006:38). Rather, Campbell's considerations around the development of new forms of religion are relevant. Even if these forms are permutations of an overall process of decline, the details of how they manifest are still of interest to scholars of religion and to the people who develop and engage in such new

[22] See §0.1, §3.1 and §3.3.3.

religious forms The dynamics of Liberal Quakerism are particularly interesting owing to the fact that there is an impetus within the group to accommodate these developments whilst maintaining a definitive sense of the Quaker identity/theology/orthodoxy on an institutional level.

(1.4.1.3) Alternative New Forms of Religion

This thesis seeks to build upon Troeltsch and Campbell's understanding of the 'religion of the educated classes', suggesting that the preferred form of religion of these classes (and indeed Liberal Quakers) does not remain static. Indeed, the thesis can be viewed as an explication and exploration of how Liberal Quakers are developing and aligning themselves with new forms of religiosity that are alternative to Troeltsch's mystic type, as candidate neo-orthodoxies ahead of the next revision of their *Book of Discipline.*

The thesis will explore these developments in conversation with sociological formulations. These formulations concern societal attitudes to definitive structures of meaning, knowledge and communal coherence in what has been variously termed as late, radical, liquid and post(-) modernity. Anthony Giddens' (1991) formulation of radical or reflexive modernity is particularly significant. His delineation of the influence of reflexivity of academic critique on radically modern views of social structures and conceptions of knowledge and meaning is even more acute, especially for a consideration of these types of developments and dynamics within an educated group such as the Liberal Quakers (see

§2.4). Whilst the thesis draws upon these sociological formulations the project is primarily concerned with providing and thickened account of the internal developments and dynamics of Quaker thought. In order to give some analysis of the internal developments and emerging views within Liberal Quakerism, the thesis draws points of comparison and illustration from developments in the philosophical projects of postmodernist thinkers (namely Mikhail Bakhtin and Jacques Derrida) and in postmodern and ecumenical theology. In conversation with these illustrative and comparative partners, the thesis delineates two streams of emerging views within Liberal Quakerism that may be understood as alternative new forms of religiosity amongst the educated classes (or at least the Liberal Quakers). The thesis labels these streams broadly as: (1) reflexive-structural responses, and (2) alteristic responses.

Delineating and illuminating these streams of Quaker responses is predominantly the work of later chapters. However, the dynamics of these new forms may be illuminated by the contrast with Troeltsch's understanding of mystic religion, and it is worth briefly outlining the divergences here. Troeltsch holds that mystics eschew communal, ritualistic (and historical) 'structural' elements in favour of a first-hand experiential religiosity and are ultimately uninterested in human relations, prioritising the direct relationship with God (1992:743). The reflexive-structural responses delineated later in the thesis (§2.5.1, Chapter 4) may be understood as an inversion of Troeltsch's formulation. They may be taken to signify a partial acceptance of a secular modern scepticism around theistic and/or absolute belief claims, but in response they turn towards a now reflexive and/or self-aware valuing of communal, ritualistic (historical) elements and away from a relationship between self and

God. The alteristic responses largely maintain a suspicion of definitive unifying socio-communal and/or historic-traditional structures whilst still being tentative in committing to a unified mystical experience in direct relationship with God. The response may be formulated as a new understanding of mysticism in late modernity. This relates religio-ethical experience not exclusively to a relationship with God, but as something fully relational, and accessible in every alteristic relation with others. Comparable developments may be seen in Derrida's universalisation of the experience of faith (Sherwood and Hart, 2004:38) and, potentially, Bakhtin's dialogistic 'philosophical anthropology' (2002b:294). The thesis formulates these two streams as new understandings of religion/religiosity. In the Liberal Quaker case this lends a way of delineating internal attempts to construct candidate neo-orthodoxies, which endeavour to respond to the groups' diverse (a)theological culture whilst trying to address the cohesion of the movement.

(1.4.1.4) Berger in Connection with Alternative Forms of New Religiosity: A Brief Consideration

The thought of Peter Berger as outlined in §1.2.1 is also useful in conceptualising the emerging alternative forms of new religiosity as the thesis delineates them. Concerning reflexive-structural responses, this can be further illuminated with reference to the post-liberal theology of George Lindbeck (2009 [1984]). Lindbeck has been drawn upon for both academic philosophical treatments of current Liberal Quaker dynamics (see Grant, 2014) and internally by Quakers in their explorations of ways in which they can understand their

common identity/theology (Russ, 2017; Wood, 2016a, 2016b). Lindbeck explicitly states that his project is influenced by the etic insights and formulations of Berger – along with those of Clifford Geertz and Ludwig Wittgenstein – but views it as possible to employ them for 'religious purposes', i.e. to develop internal theological positions and/or frameworks of understanding (2009:6). He posits that:

> … a religion can be viewed as a cultural/linguistic medium that shapes the entirety of life and thought … it is similar to an idiom that makes possible the description of realities, the formulations of beliefs and the experiencing of inner attitudes, feelings and sentiments. Like a culture or language, it is a communal phenomenon that shapes the subjectivities of individuals rather than being primarily manifestations of those subjectivities. It comprises a vocabulary of discursive or nondiscursive symbols together with a distinctive logic or grammar in terms of which this vocabulary can be meaningfully deployed. (2009:18)

Lindbeck is proposing that members of religious groups can recognise their religion as manifested and sustained as a socio-cultural-linguistic (plausibility) structure. However, they can legitimately seek and maintain a common sense of cultural-linguistic structure or grammar and tradition on the pragmatic basis that it allows them to develop senses of meaning. This imparts a structure which enriches the way they live their lives within a sustained religious community or tradition. It is worth noting Lindbeck's theological formulation of 'cultural-linguistic' models here in relation to the consideration of Berger. The thesis later explores how Quakers have appealed to similar, albeit not always exactly correspondent, notions in trying to formulate understandings of a cohesive Quaker identity/orthodoxy in light of their theological diversity and permissiveness.[23]

[23] See. §2.5.1 and Chapters 3 and 4.

It is also worth noting that Lindbeck's project was motivated by a desire to provide a better framework for ecumenical work and discussions across the Christian Churches. He was concerned with providing a framework which would allow the particularities of each tradition to be respected (rather than simply being subsumed into a unified whole) whilst still allowing a route towards dialogue and mutual understanding – 'the possibility of reconciliation without capitulation' (2009:3). It stands to reason that similar responses may have an appeal for Quakers who are attempting to (both respect and) reconcile their intra- (rather than an inter-) religious diversity.

Considering the alteristic responses, Berger's delineation of how communal structures act to influence and construct individual beliefs, attitudes and phenomenological experiences is useful. Both Berger and Lindbeck hold that these structures must maintain a certain degree of uniformity to be effective in engendering and informing subjective experiences and senses of meaning. Pluralisation and fluidity are therefore seen to militate against self-sustaining functioning of socio-religious groups, thus feeding into their fragmentation. However, Liberal Quakers, at least to an extent, can arguably be now seen as a group that recognises and has been permeated by its theological diversity and fluidity – its normative values being even to a degree defined in reference to that mode (Dandelion, 2004; Dandelion and Collins, 2014). It seems a valid frame of enquiry to ask whether this more fluid structure can influence (feed into) traceable and characteristic phenomenological/theological notions – ones that reflect a mode of development orientated towards diversification, openness and shifting. The thesis draws on the religio-

ethical experiential notions developed in the thought of Bakhtin and Derrida,[24] in order to illuminate how this process might proceed, before drawing comparisons with emerging views currently seen within the Liberal Quaker discursive landscape.[25]

On the basis of this consideration of developments of alternative new religious forms in comparison with developments in academic (theological/philosophical) schools of thought, the development of Quakerism for which this thesis seeks to argue can be neatly summarised. In the light of the Lindbeckian-esque developments, the Liberal Quaker theological culture could be framed as developing from an initially liberal, to a hyper-liberal and then to a post-liberal form. Considering the alteristic responses, it could be framed as developing from an experiential (phenomenological) to a 'structuralist' and then a 'poststructuralist' form. These offer a simplified and tidy way of expressing the type of development the project seeks to explicate. In reality the dynamics are far less linear and more complex and multifaceted (with structural postliberal-type responses and alteristic responses coming concurrently to the fore in Quaker discussions). However, they do bear witness to an important dynamic of Liberal Quakerism in that the group may partly follow, reflect and to an extent be directly reflexively influenced by developments in academic critique.

[24] See §2.5.2.
[25] See Chapters 3–5.

(1.5) Conclusion

This chapter has given an overview of Quaker history and the development of Liberal Quakerism up until the 1994 revision of the *Book of Discipline*. The chapter argued that in the later decades of the 20th century Liberal Quakerism moved to accommodate its plural and permissive theological culture while still holding an implicit theological rationale by adopting universalist assumptions. The chapter considered this in light of Troeltsch's and Campbell's conceptualisations around mystic-type religion as a form of religion that was particularly appealing to the modern mind-set, especially that of the 'educated classes'. Campbell posits the compatibility of mystic-type religion with a modern educated mind-set because the individualism of mystic-type religion along with its flexibility in incorporating a plurality of religious views makes it highly adaptable to a tolerant temperament. Similar motivations, especially to be tolerant and accommodating towards theological plurality alongside respecting individualism (i.e. the authority of an individual's reason in developing their beliefs), can be seen as factors in the development of the Quaker universalist position and its adoption as a loose orthodoxy.

However, the chapter has also noted earlier indications that the scope of Liberal Quaker diversity may be going beyond the 'universalist accommodation'. The mystic type of religion itself – with its focus on radical individualism – may be seen to work against institutional religious structures. This places tensions on universalist assumptions in their role of acting as a form of orthodoxy and cohering Liberal Quakers as a group. Furthermore, the chapter considered that there were early indications of openings via which Quakers may seek to

understand their common identity. This was not via a theology based on a religious experience of universal origin but rather in their social values and the way they lived their lives in the world. This possible route of development follows Davie's contention that Quakers had started moving away from a 'liberal' towards a 'radical' form. Additionally, the chapter observed how certain academic formulations – Plüss' concerning Quakers' exercising an 'epistemological collectivism', and Dandelion's concerning an 'absolute perhaps' – also indicated that Quakers may seek to accommodate views that pressurised a universalist-type theological rationale. However, the chapter noted that in Plüss' and Dandelion's earlier discussions around these concepts, both these authors still suggested that, in terms of its operation, the openness towards difference still revolved primarily around a belief in a religious experience, placing these formulations closer in scope to the accommodation offered by the universalist assumptions.

Chapter 2
Conceptualising Liberal Quaker Dynamics: Orthopraxy, Further Breakdown, Theories of 'Late Modernity' and Possible Internal Responses

(2.0) Introduction

This chapter begins by examining previous conceptualisations from academics in the field of Quaker Studies which suggest that Liberal Quakerism has diversified beyond an accommodating universalist theological rationale, namely Dandelion's formulations around the behavioural creed (orthodoxy) and the 'absolute perhaps'. The chapter considers and argues along with previous insights regarding how even these suggested points of 'coherence' are not as stable as they might seem given the current dynamics of the group.

The chapter considers the extent to which the current context and dynamics of Liberal Quakerism may usefully be understood with reference to theories of 'late modernity'. Concerning the ostensibly opposed theories of postmodernity and 'hypermodernity', the chapter argues that the differences are largely ones of semantics and degree, and all such formulations may be usefully edifying to the Liberal Quaker case. The chapter does, however, take the position that Liberal Quakerism is probably not best understood as non-foundational 'all the way down' (Critchley, 2009:84), and that the dynamic of reflexivity highlighted in the work of Giddens is particularly pertinent to the Liberal Quaker case. However, the chapter also notes that philosophical positions often associated with

postmodernism are themselves not necessarily non-foundational 'all the way down', with the theorists associated with these positions developing comparatively useful reflections. From this the chapter seeks to give a more detailed delineation of how Quakers may internally respond to the uncertain and shifting dynamics of their discursive landscape, in line with what the thesis terms reflexive-structural responses and alteristic responses.

(2.1) Beyond the Universalism vs. Christocentrism Binary: Dandelion's Behavioural Creed and Orthopraxy

Concerning Dandelion's contention that Liberal Quakers have moved to cohering themselves around orthopraxy and a behavioural creed (mentioned in §1.2.1.1 above), it is notable that part of his rationale for positing this was that even in the 1990s he held that Quaker development was not as simple as moving from a largely Christian to a universalist theological outlook. This may be how Quakers framed the debate on an organisational level, but concerning the nature of popular belief amongst Quakers Dandelion argues that the differences were 'far more complex' (Dandelion, 1996:xv), with not just two but 'numerous fields of theological division' (1996:157). He demonstrates in his research that individually Quakers on both sides of the universalist–Christocentric debate hold and express personal beliefs on the Bible, Jesus and God. These range from what might be considered more orthodoxly Christian-Quaker to the more non-traditional (1996:132-162). It is this work that caused Dandelion to first propose that it was most accurate to understand British Quakers as theologically pluralistic and post-Christian (1996:xv).

Anticipating the current issue of nontheism within the group, Dandelion also notes that there are Quakers who express an agnostic uncertainty around the issue of God, along with members who (self-)identify as atheists (1996:157-158). However, directly after marking the existence of Quakers identifying as atheists, Dandelion notes the possibility that many are not atheists in the sense of believing that there is no God (or divine/mystical/ontological content to religious experience), but rather they are 'denying one particular view of God'. He notes one respondent whose identification as an atheist was largely a protest against particularised, specific and contained concepts of God (ibid.).

His suggestion that Quakers were beginning to cohere their identity primarily around their collective engagement in the practice of silent worship and a conservative attitude towards the etiquette of this practice, along with the 'culture of silence' (2008a:25-32), seeks to explain how Quakers maintain a sense of coherence given a theological diversity that extends beyond accommodating universalist-type assumptions. Internal appeals to structures of orthopraxy can be seen in some of the current responses to the issue of nontheism and Quaker theological diversity more broadly.[26] If this response was followed by Liberal Quakers, it would suggest that Quakers are not developing a new orthodoxy in the sense of a collectively agreed discursive theology, but are rather opting to maintain their coherence by extensively marginalising theology and 'orthodoxy' in favour of orthopraxy – in the manner indicated by Dandelion's academic formulations.

[26] See §4.2.

(2.2) Breakdown of the Behavioural Creed and the Absolute Perhaps

However, the idea that a 'behavioural creed' and/or orthopraxy is a sufficient basis for Quaker coherence has been challenged (from both external sociological and internal theological positions). Dandelion notes at the end of his thesis that orthopraxy may break down as a basis for Quaker coherence: the pluralistic and liberal belief culture of Liberal Quakerism could feed into the development of heteropraxis, leading to the group's complete fragmentation (1996:316-317). Hampton reaffirms this concern at the end of her analysis of the 2013 British Quaker Survey, relating it specifically to the issue of nontheism:

> Quaker identity, in light of the identification of the Non-theist group, may well be considered a problem. The problem for the Society is at what point the diversity of beliefs found amongst those attending manifests itself as diversity of behaviour. As Dandelion stated in his work … the behavioural creed that Quakers employ is the only way the group can be maintained. The danger of the Non-theist group if their numbers keep increasing, is that this conservative approach to behaviour may be disrupted, so disrupting the unity of the group. (2014:43)

Additionally, Collins has regularly raised cautions (on a conceptual level) around the sufficiency of a behavioural creed as a mechanism for coherence. He notes that ' …it is worth reminding ourselves that symbols are necessarily polyvalent: when we seem to be doing the same thing we may not be doing the same thing…' (2002a:151): i.e. the 'polyvalent' nature of the behavioural creed (as symbolic action) allows a potential proliferation of divergent interpretations (ibid.). It should be noted that Collins shares Dandelion's concern for practice: via a deployment of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus' he develops the idea of Quakers partly maintaining a common sense in reference to certain collectively embodied 'behavioural dispositions' (2002a, 2008:48-51), a concept that

resonates with that of behavioural creed. However, in connection with his perception of the polyvalence of behaviour, Collins moves to claim that behaviour cannot remain insulated and static as a basis for group identity owing to the fact that it is discursively and/or dialogically engaged with, being reflected upon in various ways:

> Aspects of the habitus are open to reflection and interrogation: they are considered and discussed, joked about and debated … there is a strong case for arguing that our reality, or realities, are constituted dialogically, largely in conversation with others … Merely to present oneself at meeting is to initiate dialogue … Adepts anticipate the newcomer's shared account of their discovery of Quakerism and are rarely disappointed. Subsequently, these narrative accounts are inevitably exchanged and, during such dialogues, selves are constructed and reconstructed (2002a:152).

In noting the interactive role of these dialogical elements and 'shared … narrative accounts' in the construction of Quaker identity, Collins offers a way of viewing the more discursive elements of Quaker identity as not entirely marginalised. Arguably, he extends the notion of Quaker communal practice from Dandelion's conceptual focus on behaviour to include communally constructed narratives (ibid.). Consequently, Collins positions Quakerism as constructing a semiotic structure which, while protean, works to shift Liberal Quakers towards some points of commonality. Collins notes that a consideration of narratives facilitates an understanding of Liberal Quaker identity, defined not solely by 'constraints' around behaviour, but as constructive 'creative and imaginative endeavour' (2002a:158). This more positive aspect of Collins' work will be revisited later in the chapter (§2.5); here, the important point is that Collins views Dandelion's behavioural creed as insufficient for capturing the complexities at work in the constitution of Quaker identity – the interrelationship between behavioural and discursive elements, and the potential for the latter to put pressure on the stability of the former.

Additionally, Pilgrim's contention that Liberal Quakers define themselves by operating a heterotopic impulse to organise as alternative to mainstream society illustrates how Liberal Quakers may seek to formulate their identity in ways that do not exactly align with the group's conservative orthopraxy; rather, they exert pressurise for the maintenance that orthopraxy. Pilgrim's claim that this heterotopic impulse has now turned inwards is predictive that structures including the Quaker method of worship may continue to be further challenged (2008:64). Indeed, Helen Meads (2011) has connected this heterotopian style of thinking with the Experiment with Light group within Liberal Quakerism, which does take a different approach to the practice of worship.

Following such criticisms, Dandelion has accepted that his analysis promoting the behavioural creed as Liberal Quakerism's paramount boundary function ' … gives too little attention to the common and normative way in which … diverse beliefs were maintained within the group' (2004:222). Indeed, it was this concern that motivated him to develop the concept of 'absolute perhaps' and 'prescription for seeking' as acting as a secondary boundary function for the group (Dandelion, 2008a:33-36, 2004:222; Dandelion and Collins, 2014:293). This concept[27] relates to his claim that Quakers have developed an attitude where any 'truth claims' made around religious belief are seen as at best 'problematic', at worst 'meaningless', and consequently have committed themselves to a belief system typified by perpetual 'seeking' with the impossibly of finding. He even promulgates that a

[27] Previously discussed in §1.3.3.

number of Liberal Quakers have become 'prescriptive' around this perpetually uncertain seeking, ironically making moves towards its becoming the normative (if not still implicit) Quaker 'orthocredence' (2008a:22). Under the banner of the 'absolute perhaps', the diversity of belief can become a marker for this new, bizarrely defining feature of uncertainty and may thus be celebrated:

> Friends have decided that religious truth claims are problematic, perhaps even neither true or false but meaningless. From outside the religious enterprise they are sure of this. In other words, they are absolutely certain (rationally) that they can never be certain (theologically). They operate a doctrine of 'absolute perhaps' and they operate it in a prescriptive way … The 'absolute perhaps' is the defining characteristic of the Liberal Quaker … (2008a:35)

(2.3) Liberal Quakerism as Postmodern?

The concept of 'absolute perhaps' has certain resonances with that of the postmodern condition. The 'postmodern condition' is most commonly defined with reference to François Lyotard's formulation of an 'incredulity towards metanarratives' (Lyotard, 1984:xxiv) or as a general scepticism about (or even renunciation of) the ability to make any overarching universal or foundational truth claims – somewhat mirroring Quakers' scepticism over 'religious truth claims'. Lyotard's formulation, however, is far from conclusive. There have been numerous debates concerning the exact nature of the postmodern.[28] However, it is noteworthy that in certain senses the Liberal Quaker permissiveness can lead to some similar dynamics. In his chapter 'A Postmodern Quest', Martin Koci advocates that the way to approach religious belief in a postmodern context is in a state of seeking, showing parallels with Dandelion's characterisation of Liberal Quakers:

[28] These will be returned to shortly below, §2.3.1.

> The issue at stake is not to teach seekers how to dwell in the Church. On the contrary, dwellers must join seekers, dwell among them for a while, and thus learn how to seek God … the Church must go out of the temple and enter into the courtyard of nations (seekers). The Church must seek God with seekers. (Koci, 2015:93-94)

It is notable that a number of scholars in the field of Quaker Studies have previously considered Quaker dynamics in the light of the sociological conception of the postmodern. Dandelion himself in his earlier PhD thesis considered the application of the theory of postmodernity and the label of 'postmodern' to Quaker dynamics (1996:319). He notes Jeremy Carrette's claim that 'silence holds together the epistemological anarchy of postmodernism' (Carrette, 1993:237), which may be seen to resonate with his notion of 'the culture of silence'. Dandelion relates the concept of the postmodern and postmodernity to a diversity and plurality of belief, drawing on Zygmunt Bauman's claim that: 'The main feature ascribed to "postmodernity" is thus the permanent and irreducible *pluralism* of cultures, communal traditions, ideologies, forms of life or "language games"' (1988:225). However, Dandelion seems to position this as feeding into the postmodern epistemological position that there is no single universal truth. Moreover, he positions the diversity of a postmodern society as a reflection of this epistemological position saying that: 'The lack of unity in the postmodern world validates itself' (Dandelion, 1996:320). In comparing this to the Quaker epistemology he draws on Williams, who stated in a discussion paper:

> Quaker epistemology … has a lot in common with post-modern epistemology; in its denial of a knowable absolute standard … and its acceptance … that the light may be revealed to different people in different ways. (1992:2, cited in: Dandelion 1996:320)

It is, however, questionable how much an epistemology that accepts that there may be various ways of expressing a common Quaker religious experience fits with a postmodern epistemology; rather, it still seems to validate a view that there is a universal truth or 'meta-narrative' being striven for, in line with the modern ideal of progress legitimised by individual reason (Davie, 2007:107). Dandelion's later concept of the 'absolute perhaps', concerning a more definite view of epistemological uncertainty around claims relating to the Quaker religious experience and the commitment to continual seeking, seems to fit more closely with a postmodern epistemological position. However, there is still a question over Dandelion's view of the extent of the 'absolute perhaps' and whether it still revolves around a notion of a common religious experience, albeit one that cannot be adequately accessed and/or expressed.

At the time of his doctoral research, however, Dandelion suggested that Liberal Quakerism was not properly postmodern, primarily because, in his view, the group still operated the behavioural creed, which he suggested could be understood as a 'meta-narrative' (1996:320). This conflicts with the treatment Plüss gives of Liberal Quaker dynamics in relation to a postmodern framework in her 2007 paper 'Analysing non-doctrinal socialisation'. Plüss understands postmodernity '… as characterised by the disintegration of meta-narratives, traditional sources of authority and objectivity for individuals' meanings … [and] associated with doubt rather than stable beliefs' (2007:254). Her understanding therefore identifies defining postmodern features as being highly 'cognitively orientated' concerning positions around knowledge, meaning and belief (ibid.). She suggests that this has typically been seen to undermine social coherence (ibid.). Similarly to Dandelion, she suggests that Liberal Quakers may maintain their coherence, not in reference to common

cognitively held beliefs, but rather in relation to the socialisation of certain behaviours (2007:254,256). However, Plüss does not see this as negating Liberal Quakerism as having moved into a postmodern context. Rather, she holds that these behavioural features may be deployed as a coherence mechanism in spite of the group's exemplifying postmodern features with respect to its culture around belief and discursive theological features (2007:269).

If the defining features of a postmodern condition are taken to refer to epistemological positions and a scepticism towards universal or overarching claims, this still raises the question of whether Dandelion's later formulation of the 'absolute perhaps' lends itself to an understanding of Liberal Quakers as postmodern in terms of a general epistemological position. Notably, in his thesis publication Dandelion assents to a criticism of the 'inherent contradiction of the postmodern position', saying: 'The irony and contradiction of the consensual ideological call for a postmodern break-up of consensus is overlooked' (1996:230). Plausibly, Dandelion's later development of the 'absolute perhaps', as acting as a point of 'orthocredence' and a cohering boundary function, may be regarded as distinct from his understanding of a postmodern position. The epistemological consensus around a perpetual uncertainty is not overlooked but performs the exact function of maintaining a consensus around the group identity. The extent to which embracing (a)theological diversity and a subsequent prescribed attitude of perhapsness as distinct from a postmodern position is, however, questionable. Collins notes that the Liberal Quaker tendency to embrace and celebrate the heterogeneous and vaguely defined state of modern Quaker belief has 'distinctly post-modern overtones':

> The issue of Quaker identity is problematic … a *practical* problem one might say for Quakers themselves. This is so because of the heterogeneity of Quaker belief … Quakers often seem to see the problem as a solution or in any case as a cause for celebration … It is a celebration with distinctly **post-modern overtones** in that a creedless Quakerism allows considerable scope for variation in belief and practice. (2008:38; emphasis in italics original, in bold my own)

However, here Collins' use of the word 'overtones' is suggestive; it may indicate a slight hesitancy to view Quakerism as postmodern at its core as opposed to merely having some of the outward appearances of modernity in its valuing of the diversity and permissiveness of its theological culture. It may be asked whether Quakers do in fact operate a postmodern incredulity towards metanarratives and claims towards universal truths. Are they becoming completely non-foundational in their attitude towards truth claims? Does the Quaker attitude of 'absolute perhaps' extend 'all the way down' (Critchley, 2009:84)?

§§2.3.1–2.4.1 of this chapter are concerned with examining how these 'post-modern overtones' should be best understood in the wider context of the dynamics and development of the Liberal Quaker community. Is it useful or accurate to consider Quakers as having entered a postmodern context? Have they totally eschewed truth claims about the Quaker religious experience and Quaker beliefs? The chapter then moves on to explore this in conversation with related but slightly divergent academic sociological conceptualisations around late modernity. Particular attention is given to the role of reflexivity in many of these conceptualisations as informing dynamics of uncertainty and shifting senses of meaning. The chapter seeks to demonstrate that such reflexivity can be seen as highly pertinent to understanding the Liberal Quaker case. This discussion is connected to the question of whether developments within the group are a natural consequence of their initial embrace of modernity leading into postmodernity; or would

Liberal Quakerism's postmodern-like heterogeneity constitute a break with even the broadly modernist basic principles of the Quaker movement? §2.5 seeks to expand upon the comparative framework used in the thesis' later formulations of Quaker responses to the diverse, open, shifting and reflexive dynamics of their discursive landscape, responses delineated in this thesis as (1) reflexive-structural and/or (2) alteristic. By consulting internal philosophical/theological views of thinkers associated with postmodernism and/or comparable diverse and shifting views of human discourse (namely, Lindbeck, Bakhtin and Derrida) – and thus containing responses to comparable discursive dynamics – the chapter positions the internal Quaker responses in relation to the aforementioned academic formulations concerning societal developments extending from and/or going beyond modernity.

(2.3.1) Issues with the Application of the Term Postmodern: In General and Quaker Contexts

In order to develop an exploration of how the dynamics and development of the Liberal Quaker community should best be understood and whether it is useful and appropriate to apply the term 'postmodern' and/or alternative academic conceptualisations concerning late modernity, it is pertinent to give to a more detailed consideration of what the postmodern entails.

The often fuzzy distinction between the '*-ities*' and the '*-isms*' of modernity/postmodernity and modernism/postmodernism requires explanation. 'Modernity' and 'postmodernity' refer to pervading social/economic structures and trends, i.e. the program and movement

of society at large (Davie, 2007:89-90). 'Modernism' and 'postmodernism' refer more specifically to the various cultural movements, discourses and critiques within the society that reflect the wider societal context (ibid.). Obviously these 'postmodernist' cultural movements may take a plurality of forms. Often the terms are employed to denote aesthetic forms: artistic, literary or architectural movements. However, more importantly for this discussion, the terms are also used to refer to intellectual and academic critiques (Giddens, 1991:45-46). This again could be divided by discipline: a sociological analysis simply arguing that society is in a state of postmodernity could be considered part of the postmodernist discourse. However, 'modernism'/'postmodernism' can also be used in a stronger sense to refer to philosophical/epistemological discourses concerning the actual nature of truth, knowledge, experience and progress. These discourses may relate more directly to the content of views held by individuals ostensibly within a modern or postmodern context, rather than simply commenting on whether they are being adopted. Admittedly, these distinctions between social trends and cultural forms, between sociological and epistemological critiques, are extremely 'fluid', with them bleeding together and existing in a nexus relationship, with intellectual discourses influencing modes of being and worldviews in wider society and vice versa (Davie, 2007:90). Indeed, commentators such as Giddens hold the view that the interactions between social trends and their sociological critiques are a key active element in the overall dynamics being examined (1991:15). These divides may often break down, but they denote some commonly used distinctions and are worth mentioning before moving to a more detailed consideration of the 'nature' of the 'postmodern'.

Lyotard (who coined the term postmodern) and scholars who endorse the thesis of postmodernity commonly argue that the term usefully denotes a significant 'break' with modern (Jameson, in: Lyotard, 1984:vii). Lyotard views modernity as a period in society where truth claims and beliefs were still narratively legitimised; where, inspired by scientific, economic and industrial achievements, western society largely subscribed to a 'metanarrative' of human epistemological progress (1984:xxiv). While religious authority was arguably shaken by modernity, there still remained an idea of universal truths that people could now discern rationally. There was still something to aim for and – free from clerical authority – build towards more stridently. However, Lyotard claims that in the later 20th century, with the rise of communication technology and the proliferation and ease of access to a wide range of information, knowledge, truth and belief claims came to be viewed and legitimised in a distinctly different way (1984:3-4). According to Lyotard, people in the now postmodern society view knowledge, not as something relating to an overarching narrative, but rather as a heterogeneity of internally coherent modules. Drawing on Wittgenstein, Lyotard frames these modules as 'language-games', which attain coherence with reference to their own rules/structures (1984:10). He posits that these modular language games are valued, legitimised and deployed in relation to their relevant pragmatism/utility rather than in relation to any concept of absolute truth. No system of acquiring, understanding or codifying knowledge is seen to take universal precedence (1984:15).

It is helpful to detail and consider some interpretations directed more specifically at (philosophical/epistemological) postmodernism – not the positing of a societal move from modernity to postmodernity but, more specifically, the content of postmodernist positions

of the type that, Lyotard argues, individuals generally adopt within postmodernity. This may clarify some more characteristics that can find parallels in the current state of Liberal Quakerism. It will also help later when the internal philosophical and/or theological views of Lindbeck, Cupitt, Bakhtin and Derrida are considered, all of whom have been to a greater or lesser extent associated with a postmodernist position.[29]

Extracting her understanding mainly from the work of poststructuralist thinkers, which may be seen to include Derrida and Lyotard's later work, Seyal Benhabib ([1995] 2011) gives a particularly clear treatment of philosophical postmodernism in her paper 'Feminism and Postmodernism'. The article actually advocates against adopting a postmodernist position and may inadvertently offer an overly simplistic account, perhaps presenting a homogenised view of the discourse. Indeed, the later arguments of the present thesis depend on showing that the later developments and reflections of these thinkers disrupt their simple labelling of non-foundationalist postmodernists. However, Benhabib usefully serves to give a broad sketch of the typical way in which the postmodernist critique is conceived (often from a non-postmodernist perspective). With similarities to Lyotard's analysis, Benhabib formulates postmodernist projects as generally typified by the removal of strong foundational bases for truth and knowledge; however (following Jane Flax), she marks this out as leading to three key theses:

> (1) *The Death of the Subject* – where individuals are no longer seen as the prime location where experience and knowledge are constituted; rather, the experience

[29] Associations made between Bakhtin and postmodernism are generally less clear and explicit; see §2.5.2.

and knowledge of individuals is informed/constructed by the contexts, discourses and 'cultural-linguistic' (Lindbeck, 2009:18) structures that surround them – as seen in Lyotard's language-game methodology;

(2) *The Death of History* – where ideas of teleology and progress are no longer subscribed to; rather there is no purpose or end goal for human knowledge/society to advance towards – comparable to Lyotard's noted dissolution of grand narratives in society;

(3) *The Death of Metaphysics* – where there is no longer any universal basis for absolute truth claims.

This conceptualisation, as suggested above, is not without problems, but it is quite typical.

Giddens, for example, who also does not subscribe to the postmodern thesis, believing the term to be a misnomer, gives a similar 'outsider' description of the positions the postmodernity thesis envisions people as adopting:

> What does post-modernity ordinarily refer to? Apart from the general sense of living through a period of marked disparity from the past, the term usually means one or more of the following: that we have discovered that nothing can be known with any certainty, since all pre-existing 'foundations' of epistemology have been shown to be unreliable; that 'history' is devoid of teleology and consequently no version of 'progress' can plausibly be defended. (1991:45-46)

Notably, Giddens does not see the distinction between postmodernity (as referring to a social phase) and postmodernism (as referring to the actual epistemological positions) as

significant or helpful. Giddens prefers to delimit postmodernism as referring to aesthetic styles:[30]

> Post-modernism if it means anything, is best kept to refer to styles or movements within literature, painting, the plastic arts, and architecture. It concerns aspects of aesthetic reflection upon the nature of modernity [*Note:* Giddens views 'postmodernity' as a misnomer] … modernism is or was one might say a distinguishable outlook in these various areas and might be said to have been displaced by other currents of the post-modernist variety. (1991:45)

He does note that postmodernism may be used to refer to a supposed 'awareness' of the modernity-to-postmodernity 'transition'. However, again, he does not view this as a very impactful interpretation (ibid.). For Giddens, the social trends, the awareness of these trends and the adoption of epistemological positions are all very closely intertwined. This is key to what he thinks is actually occurring with the dynamics people (in his view mis)label as postmodern (1991:49). This is a provocative position, though it is questionable whether some actual 'postmodernist' thinkers see themselves only as being sensitive/aware of shifts in society, rather than their work having wider philosophical implications. This belief, that their work has wider philosophical implications, alone may merit these thinkers separate demarcation. Giddens' views will be considered in more detail, though his position serves as a good basic demonstration of how distinctions between these terms (i.e. postmodernity and postmodernism) can often be blurred. These formulations need further examination. However, hopefully now there is clarity as to how the postmodern is often conceived, i.e. as the adoption of non-foundational positions either as a wider societal trend (postmodernity) or in terms of epistemological positions (philosophical 'postmodernism').

[30] Arguably some postmodernist/poststructuralist works may be viewed as blurring the line between an intellectual argument and an aesthetic reflection and/or gesture.

When examined in more detail, these concepts of the 'postmodern' continue to share hallmarks with the development and implications of the diversity of Quaker belief. Lyotard's conceptualisation fits well in view of the fact that 86% of British Quakers enter the Quaker movement during adulthood and have often spent periods as religious 'seekers' (Dandelion, 2014:139). As such they bring values and practices from a variety of different belief structures to the extent that the latter may become influential within the movement. This is analogous to Lyotard's point about the proliferation of information. Liberal Quakerism's apparent willingness to allow people to use a variety of different belief frameworks in understanding their Quakerism parallels Lyotard's 'heterogeneity of language-games' formulation of how legitimacy is viewed within the postmodern context (Lyotard, 1984:xxv). If one were to keep following Lyotard in a comparative application of his concept of the postmodern to Quakerism, one might say that Liberal Quakers have experienced a break since their inception. One might reason that whereas Liberal Quakers once had a commitment to a 'modern' progressivism, an optimistic drive towards new revelation and a universal truth, this has broken down into a heterogenic, non-foundational, postmodern situation (Benhabib, 2011:Loc422).

(2.4) Hypermodernity and Reflexivity

Challenges may be made, however, concerning the extent to which Liberal Quakerism's pluralisation has led to the general adoption of thoroughly non-foundational positions around theological truth claims, and the extent to which the perceived movement of society that Lyotard is trying to delineate (from modernity to postmodernity) constitutes a

definitive break with the epistemological/structural assumptions of modernity. The notion that the dynamics associated with postmodernism mark a definitive paradigm shift in the manner in which society relates to knowledge and meaning is far from universally affirmed. There is a line of argument, seen primarily among European sociologists (Bauman, 2000; Beck, 1992; Beck et al., 1994; Giddens, 1991; Lash, 1999) which contends that the observed 'postmodern' traits, when properly understood, can be seen to have arisen in continuity with or indeed as a fuller realisation of the assumptions and implications of modernity: namely, modernity becoming reflexively aware of itself. Scholars who subscribe to this view prefer to label the 'period' variously along the lines of: hypermodernity, high modernity, late modernity, radical modernity, reflexive modernity (esp. Giddens; Beck; Lash) or liquid modernity (Bauman) and so on. Here, the term 'hypermodernity' will be favoured, mainly in order to correspond with Dandelion's labelling of Liberal Quakerism as 'hyper-liberal' (Dandelion and Collins, 2008:1).

This section ultimately argues that the difference between these formulations of hypermodernity and postmodernity, as typically conceived, are largely superficial ones of semantics and degree. However, in emphasising other factors, such as the reflexivity of knowledge, a consideration of hypermodernity adds an edifying level of nuance to a consideration of Liberal Quakerism. Considering that the chief concern of the present thesis is to illuminate Quaker responses to the current state of their discursive landscape and/or theological culture, an examination of these theories is helpful, as potentially broadening and thickening the project's understanding of Liberal Quaker development.

Subscribers to a hypermodernity thesis do not believe that knowledge is viewed as thoroughly non-foundational. They also often suggest that heterogeneity, while very substantial, is not as all-pervasive as postmodernists (allegedly) contend (Giddens, 1991:2). If moving into hypermodernity is a better image for conceptualisation of Quaker developments, this may also alter the way in which dynamics around diversity/coherence should be understood. The account of Liberal Quaker theological pluralism as leading to an attitude of non-foundationalism and/or 'absolute perhaps' with regard to belief, with common practices and behavioural structures taking a role as the primary mechanisms for group coherence, may be too simplistic.

Bauman gives a clear expression of the 'hypermodernist' view that the dynamics of uncertainty and 'constant change' are properly understood as a consequence and logical extension of modernity:

> Forms of modern life may differ in quite a few respects – but what unites them all is precisely their fragility, temporariness, vulnerability[;] an inclination to constant change. To 'be modern' means to modernize – compulsively, obsessively; not so much just 'to be', let alone to keep its identity intact, but forever 'becoming', avoiding completion, staying underdefined … Being always, at any stage and at all times, 'post-something' is also an undetachable feature of modernity. (Bauman, 2000: Loc173)

Giddens, however, is more explicit in arguing that the dynamism, uncertainty and flux often identified as postmodern result from a reflexive engagement with the accumulation and codification of knowledge performed with the context of modernity. It is a consequence of and still in continuity with modernity:

> The dynamism of modernity derives from the … social *disembedding* of social systems … and the *reflexive ordering and reordering* of social relations in the light of continual inputs of knowledge affecting the actions of individuals and groups. (Giddens, 1991:16, emphasis original)

A key element of Giddens' understanding of hypermodern reflexivity is the idea of individuals within society becoming self-aware of attempts to codify them rationally from the external viewpoint of an academic observer, of the 'metalanguages of the social sciences' (Giddens, 1991:15). In modernity (hypermodernity), these structural understandings, rationally compiled at a distance from local premodern traditions, actually become the major reference points by which individuals within society understand themselves, over and above the traditional:

> With the advent of modernity, reflexivity takes on a different character. It is introduced into the very basis of system reproduction, such that thought and action are constantly refracted back upon one another … To sanction a practice because it is traditional will not do; tradition can be justified, but only in the light of knowledge which is not itself authenticated by tradition … justified tradition is tradition in sham clothing and receives its identity only from the reflexivity of the modern. (Giddens, 1991:38)

However, this very reflexivity means that any attempt to rationally codify society can in itself cause a reaction and change the way society is understood and works. 'It does not lead' to a final unified understanding of how society works, or 'in a direct way to a transparent social world' (1991:15). Therefore, the teleological project of modernity to rationally discern certain knowledge (at least about society) begins to appear less and less attainable:

> … the claims of reason … appeared to offer a sense of certitude … But this idea only appears persuasive so long as we do not see that the reflexivity of modernity actually subverts reason, at any rate where reason is understood as the gaining of

> certain knowledge. Modernity is constituted in and through reflexively applied knowledge, but the equation of knowledge with certitude has turned out to be misconceived. (1991:39)

Hypermodernity, for Giddens and Bauman, is not only characterised by an awareness of these rational critiques and codifications, but also an awareness of the way these structural understandings, codifications and critiques flow and change:

> As time flows on, 'modernity' changes its forms … What was some time ago dubbed (erroneously) 'post-modernity' and what I've chosen to call, more to the point, 'liquid modernity', is the growing conviction that change is *the only* permanence, and uncertainty *the only* certainty. A hundred years ago 'to be modern' meant to chase 'the final state of perfection' -- now it means an infinity of improvement, with no 'final state' in sight and none desired. (Bauman, 2000:Loc179, emphasis original)

Giddens focuses on the mechanism by which these reflexive implications constitute a flowing relationship between the mode society and the systematising work done by academic sociological critique. The mechanism impacts upon all attempts at codification within a hypermodern context. This includes internal modes of coherence-creation found within, e.g., religious groups – comparable to the 'intrasystematic' structures of coherence and legitimacy characterised by Lindbeck as defined by a type of 'fluent-elite' (Lindbeck, 2009:50,85). If a religious group were to become reflexive about or dissolve its own structures of coherence-creation (as Liberal Quakerism arguably has), then it may be reasonably called a hypermodern or 'liquid' religion (Dandelion and Collins, 2014:300).

Subscribers to the concept of hypermodernity view their thesis as distinct from that of postmodernity in two key ways. Firstly, that the attitudes around certainty and perceived social heterogeneity have developed out of the assumptions and institutions of modernity rather than as a new paradigm. The shifting heterogeneity in social forms and modes of

belief comes from the dis-embedding and reflexive implications of the modern impetus towards rationalism. These reflexive implications are used to explain how an awareness of the heterogeneity and the shifting discourse does not mean that pragmatic concerns have superseded rational ones as grounds for legitimacy, as Lyotard's presentation of postmodernity suggests. Secondly, the hypermodernity thesis does not advocate the position that knowledge has become purely non-foundational. For Giddens, at least, the shifting and uncertainty arise from the institutions and set-up of modernity. This does not entail that universal truths do not exist or that they do not have an influence on peoples' views or beliefs or modes of being; it is more that they are hard to ascertain, as the reflexive nature of hypermodernity means the modern discourse shifts around them.

This view of a shifting reflexive discourse without non-foundationalism represents Giddens' own view on the nature of knowledge and how academic discourse functions in society. However, it is unclear to what extent he feels that individuals within hypermodernity are likely to consciously hold similar views of knowledge. This is partly because he does not draw the typical distinction between post/modernity representing overarching social trends and post/modernism referring to personal standpoints and cultural movements. Similarly, he does not distinguish sharply between what could be called sociological and epistemological postmodernism. Admittedly, he adds some caveats, but he still frequently seems to go too far in conflating postmodernity, postmodernist thought and poststructuralism. He makes the claim that 'conceptions of post-modernity … mostly have their origin in post-structuralist thought' (1991:150) before presenting a table advocating that postmodernity '[u]nderstands current transitions in epistemological terms or as dissolving epistemology all together' (ibid). It is, however, open to question whether in reply

to these transitions the postmodernity thesis is making claims about the actual workings and nature of knowledge, or is making claims about the way knowledge is perceived by individuals in society. Giddens gives a slightly different account of how these transitions might occur without recourse to non-foundationalism. This could, however, be taken as a challenge as to whether or not people should adopt postmodernist/non-foundationalist viewpoints, rather than a comment on whether or not they are doing so. Indeed, with regard to Bauman's description of a 'growing conviction that change is the only permanence, and uncertainty the only certainty' (Bauman, 2000:Loc179), one could easily imagine a number of individuals, being unaware of how this social state occurred, taking on what they consider be fully non-foundational viewpoints. One could ask whether the dynamics informing the development up to that point are really that important considering how the endpoint is so similar? Indeed, under Giddens' formulation, people's being reflexively influenced by postmodern thinkers/writings would exacerbate the adoption of postmodern views, both on societal development and the status of knowledge. Of course, this is exactly what Giddens is trying to confront.

Furthermore, it may be that criticising Giddens for this lack of distinction between epistemological and sociological postmodern claims is unfair, since the line is blurred and the two do interrelate. Perhaps the key point of hypermodernity is that the epistemological uncertainty of people in society does not go as far (towards non-foundationalism) as envisioned by subscribers to postmodernity. This is because socially there is still a continuous residual commitment to modern rationality, and therefore individuals still hold some epistemological idea of truth.

There are, however, more issues and indeed possible similarities between of Lyotard's account of the postmodern and the idea of a reflexive hypermodernity that may lead one to question whether the concept of hypermodernity is a very meaningful challenge to that of postmodernity. In discussing the relationship between the modern and the postmodern, Lyotard indicates the perceivably close connection between the two:

> What, then, is the postmodern? What place does it or does it not occupy in the vertiginous work of the questions hurled at the rules of image and narration? It is undoubtedly a part of the modern … What space does … [a postmodern work] challenge? [a modern one] … In an amazing acceleration, the generations precipitate themselves. A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant. (Lyotard, 1984:79)

Lyotard seems to be suggesting that postmodernist views are not completely divorced from modernist ones; they exist in relation to one another. The description of a 'constant' 'nascent state' places postmodernists as putting forward views of the potential development of modern movements. This has parallels with Giddens' delineation of hypermodern reflexivity, in that Lyotard has a concept of insights and innovations from cultural trends (and academic discourses) feeding back and informing the mindsets/modes of wider 'modern' society. Moreover, Lyotard's 'pragmatic language-game' formulation also contains the suggestion that people are influenced by and/or consciously utilising insights from academic critiques. Indeed, Lindbeck makes a direct comparison between Wittgenstein's language-games and Berger's sociological formulation of the 'Sacred Canopy', in that they both view legitimacy as being internally/communally constructed. Lindbeck groups them both as cultural-linguistic models (2009:5). Lyotard's perception of the postmodern condition could be characterised as individuals in society becoming self-

aware of these models.[31] This seems particularly clear in the case of Berger, and overall this can be seen as individuals bringing in and internalising elements of sociological critique from modern scholarship, comparable to Giddens' idea of hypermodern reflexivity.

The hypermodernity and postmodernity theses both agree that change has occurred in society's confidence around knowledge. They delineate some similar mechanisms as being at work in effecting this change. Largely, the difference between these positions lies in questions of semantics and degree: whether the type and extent of the changes merit the term 'postmodern' – to the point of declaring 'a postmodern era': specifically, whether the state of society (and, for the purposes to this thesis, expressly the Liberal Quaker community) can be presented as having an all-pervasive heterogeneity and non-foundationalism. The hypermodernity thesis answers these questions in the negative. Subscribers to hypermodernity see the changes as a natural part of a reflexive and shifting modern discourse; something that they see as happening within modernity rather than as a symptom of going beyond it. Giddens advocates that the term 'postmodern' should be reserved to refer to the overcoming of modern institutions (1991:151), suggesting its traditional Marxist meaning of a society that has surmounted capitalist socio-economic structures (1991:46). Whilst hypermodernity subscribers do accept a large degree of uncertainty and heterogeneity, in their view it is not unlimited. Under a hypermodernity model, the modern commitments to rationality and ultimate foundational truths still have an influence and act as sticking points, preventing the kind of groundless 'nihilism' and 'free

[31] Under Lyotard's model, 'postmoderns' would accept an idea of legitimacy as constructed, relative and shifting. However, on pragmatic grounds they would not necessarily abandon the utility of judging a belief to be legitimate or illegitimate.

play' postmodernity allegedly advocates (Kearney, 2004:154). However, the degrees of detail, definition and certainty that rationality can give around truth claims and any larger structures of understanding are seen as far less extensive in hypermodernity than was perceived to be the case earlier in the modern era.

At this point it may be reasonable to raise the question to hypermodernity theorists (particularly in terms of religious belief and communal coherence): what exactly are these sticking points that prevent groups from descending into an ever-shifting discourse and a fully fledged pervasive heterogeneity? This is one of the issues the present thesis illuminates with its formulation of reflexive-structural and alteristic responses developed in comparative conversation with 'postmodernist' theologians/thinkers and/or discourse theorists.

The fact that such thinkers have developed such notions with potential religio-politico-ethical implications indicates, as Critchley suggests with reference to Derrida, that they are not necessarily non-foundationalist 'all the way down' (2009:84). This conflicts with Giddens' characterisation of postmodernists/post-structuralists, and opens up the possibility of their being comparatively useful in illuminating Quakers' endeavouring to give some tangible expression of the faith group despite its 'liquidity'.

(2.4.1) Liberal Quakerism as a Liquid or Reflexive Religion

Nevertheless, in expanding this discussion it should be explicitly noted that the hypermodernity thesis does add a useful level of nuance in relation to thinking through Liberal Quaker dynamics, as it accounts for the diversity of belief within the group without necessitating the push towards portraying Liberal Quakers as fully non-foundational – a move that would contrast with some of the views Quakers espouse. It also fits well with and further elucidates features academics have previously described and delineated concerning Quaker beliefs and practice, and the difficulties in developing systematic understandings of Quaker coherence-creation and meaning-making.

A reflexive dynamic may be connected to Collins' criticisms of Dandelion's claim that a common practice may viably function as a basis for Quaker coherence (see §2.2). Collins' observation that Quakers continually reflect upon the state of their own group and practices, generating narrative and/or discursive resources, ties in with this emphasis on reflexive awareness, and Collins makes this connection directly (2002b:295, 2002c:89).

Additionally, in their 2014 article 'Transition as Normative: British Quakerism as Liquid Religion', Collins and Dandelion explicitly draw this connection between Liberal Quakerism and hypermodernity, primarily with reference to Bauman's conceptualisation of liquid modernity:

> Quakers are increasingly reflexive and self-critical, continually adapting to the social, political, and economic environment — a disposition that is the epitome of the liquidly modern. The work of Collins, Dandelion … Pilgrim (among others) clearly

> suggests that participation in Quakerism facilitates a liquid belief and practice … While … the solid church is structured in a manner that denies the possibility of fluidity, Quakerism appears to be structured in a way that encourages it … Quakerism is highly and normatively mutable and thus a manifestation of liquid modernity: it is liquid religion. (2014:299-300)

In making the claim that features of hypermodernity (e.g. reflexivity and liquidity) can manifest within religions such as Quakerism and not just in society at large, Collins and Dandelion draw on the work of C. N. de Groot on liquid religion. Groot explores the types of community that may be able to form in a shifting and heterogeneous hypermodern (or indeed postmodern) context and points to the idea in Bauman's work of a 'community of individuals':

> If there is to be a community in the world of the individuals, it can only be (and needs to be) a community woven together from sharing and mutual care; a community of concern and responsibility for the equal right to be human and the equal ability to act on that right. (Bauman, 2001:149-150)

Groot contends that religions do not have to be typified as rigid-structural communities, maintaining their coherence through strict boundaries that limit the choices of their members. This may be seen in more 'conservative' or 'fundamentalist' groups – or even in the function of Lindbeck's 'cultural-linguistic' structures, defined in reference to a concept of competency or a 'fluent elite' (Lindbeck, 2009:85; Grant, 2014:90). Religions may, instead, be able to facilitate activities around concerns for care and mutuality, whilst allowing for personal innovative beliefs, critical reflexivity and a certain liquidity:

> Whereas Bauman identifies religion with segregated communities, delivered from the constraint of choice, religion also involves the actual social lives of individuals and religion may be involved in the constitution of communities 'lite' … religion … may even provide the better opportunities for a 'community of individuals'. (Groot, 2008:288)

Collins and Dandelion draw upon this to claim that British Quakerism is ' … a faith group that is as liquid as the society in which it lives and breathes … and probably has been for over a century at least, a liquid religion' (2014:291). Groot's characterisation of a 'community of individuals' revolving around a commitment to 'mutual care' and autonomy, i.e. 'the equal right to be human' and 'ability to act to on that right', is relevant. It connects with the type of ethic delineated in the present thesis as involved in the alteristic responses. This supports the thesis' argument that such a move may be made in response to Quakerism's own diverse and permissive cultural mode.[32] However, in their 2014 paper Dandelion and Collins do not focus on discussing the potential details and/or discursive content of the types of belief that may emerge within a 'liquid religion'; instead, they concentrate on delineating Liberal Quakerism's high degree of reflexivity and the subsequent normative valuation of the transition and flow of Quaker belief and structure. In supporting this, they point to the kind of dynamics found in Liberal Quakerism outlined in §2.1 above; namely, the diverse and permissive belief culture and Dandelion's concept of the 'absolute perhaps.' They also draw on ethnographic work and primary textual data derived from the Quaker community, along with a number of other relevant academic/sociological formulations (2014:291-298).

It is notable that the field of Quaker Studies is relatively loaded with delineations of dynamics resonant to the dynamics of hypermodernity, a few of which are worth discussing. The concept of a hypermodern 'reflexive ordering and reordering of social relations' has parallels with Collins' claim that ' … Quaker identity is sustained primarily through the generation and regeneration of stories … ' (Collins, 2008:52). Pilgrim's concept of an internalised Quaker heterotopic impulse (by which she means that Quakers will deliberately

[32] See §2.5.2 and Chapter 5.

seek out 'alternate *orderings*', resulting in a type of shifting similar to the one characterised by the hypermodernity thesis) is also relevant (2008:64). Significantly, though, Pilgrim depicts the drive for this shifting as a common character trait found among Friends, developing from the non-conformist nature and history of the Quaker movement (2008:55-58). She does not explicitly cast this shifting in the hypermodern terms of the rationalising/codifying push of modernity implicitly leading to a reflexive shifting.

In his 2008 chapter 'The Problem of Quaker Identity', Collins is explicit in formulating an understanding of modern and Quaker dynamics as specifically revolving around the idea of inherent difficulties in maintaining 'codifications'. Collins' argument draws on the work of Bruno Latour and Webb Keane. He takes Latour's designation that there are two divergent drives operating in the ordering of the modern era: '*purification*', which works to create 'distinct ontological zones', and '*translation*', which 'creates mixtures … hybrids of nature and culture' (2008:45). He affirms Keane's claim that 'purification can never be entirely successful' as 'hybrids' are constantly 'proliferating' (2008:46). Whilst Collins notes that Quakers have tried to eschew creeds and may have a suspicion around language, he does not believe they have managed to avoid codification. With parallels to the issues outlined in §2.1 above, Collins advocates that semiotic forms cannot be avoided – attempted forms of codification still happen. However, once codifications are constructed, then 'translation' or the proliferation of 'hybrids' or shifting necessarily begins, as Collins says: ' … once semiotic forms are introduced to the social world, they become available as materials for experience on which further work can be carried out … ' (2008:48). Again, this places a particular conceptualisation of Quakers in line with ideas of reflexive or liquid modernity, a general connection which he and Dandelion make explicit in their 2014 paper.

Collins is more direct in teasing out the Quaker dynamic of reflexivity throughout his work, beyond his collaborative paper with Dandelion. In a piece entitled 'Connecting Anthropology and Quakerism: Transcending the Insider/Outsider Dichotomy', Collins promotes the notion that Quakers often engage with their belief in a reflective and/or reflexive manner that 'dialectically' mimics sociological/anthropological academic analysis (2002c:87-93). Collins also points to how Quakers will often set up courses to internally discuss topics such as 'community', suggesting a propensity for self-awareness and internal reflection (ibid.). The current manner in which Liberal Quakers have engaged with the theism–nontheism debate – discussing the issue in internal Quaker periodicals, and setting up a think tank specifically to consider the issue (Boulton, 2016:57) – speaks to this internal reflexive trait. Collins gives an illuminating example from an event that took place during his thesis research:

> The meeting arranged for Dereck, a Quaker well known for running interesting courses, to speak to the meeting on the subject of 'community'. This is a popular theme of conferences, retreats, courses, pamphlets, and so forth initiated by Quakers and further suggested a concerted tendency towards reflexivity. He began … by noting … the way in which the meeting room was organised … and how this symbolised equality … He went on to suggest the important theological consequences of this arrangement … By this point I was hoping he would soon stop in that I would have little else to say in my thesis ... what is an anthropologist left with when his/her informants are capable of this level of analysis – even drawing on those self-same theorists one is drawing on as an academic? My feeling remains that … the anthropologist can only record them, understand how and why they compare, and set his/her own account alongside them. (2002c:90)

Collins notes that correspondences between Quakers' own internal formulations and those found in academic critique may come about either because Quakers are internally reflecting upon comparable subject matter (i.e. intra-reflexivity) or even because they have direct knowledge of theorists in the academic field (i.e. extra-reflexivity). Regarding the former,

Dandelion's formulation concerning the continual cyclical development of new orthodoxy surrounding the revision of the *Book of Discipline*[33] also indicates a high level of self-reflection/reflexivity on an internal level. This may be seen to inform both the shifting and the fluid movement of the group. However, Dandelion's formulation places this reflexive shifting as happening more between the coherence-making constructions formed on an organised/group level and the personal innovations happening on a popular/individual level, and less as a direct engagement with academic critique. The potential for Quakers to be aware of academic theorists should not come as a surprise, however, given the highly educated membership of British Quakerism (Dandelion 2014:2; §1.5.1.1 above). It is an apt community to be engaging in academic/sociological critique in the manner described by Giddens (1991), and this is unsurprising given that the originating principles of the Liberal strand of Quakerism may be seen to have an affinity with the values of the 'educated classes' in the early 20th century (Campbell, 1978; Troeltsch, 1992). It seems reasonable to posit that a group attracted to such principles would follow a trajectory of becoming increasingly reflexive in terms of both internal reflection and engagement with academic critique, as indeed Liberal Quakers seem to have done.

It should not be dismissed as a coincidence that the inception of Liberal Quakerism approximately coincided with the Universities Tests Act of 1871, which removed impediments to Quakers' entering universities. A significant consequence of Quakers entering the academy is the relatively recent emergence of Quaker Studies, and specifically Quaker sociology, as a field of study. Quaker sociology materialised in earnest as a distinctive field with the effectively concurrent publication of Dandelion, Collins and Plüss'

[33] See §0.2 above.

doctoral theses in the years 1993 to 1996 (Dandelion and Collins, 2008:3-6). The rise of research into Quaker sociology, often by scholars who identify as members of the religious group (Dandelion, Collins, Grant, Meads and Pilgrim are all Quakers), has created more academic works reflecting directly on the group, which can in turn be reflexively engaged. This is particularly the case with the work of Dandelion, who has also published extensively as a Quaker as well as an academic and is highly visible within the Quaker community. Thus, these academic formulations give a point of departure for discursive permutations and/or codifications that may internally develop in response to the disparate, fragmentary and open movement which may be seen to typify the internal culture of Liberal Quakerism.

The manner by which hypermodern reflexivity may not only disturb social structures of knowledge and coherence, but also encourage the further production of discursive/semiotic elements concerning collective notions of knowledge, belief and/or practice, is well expressed by Chouliaraki and Fairclough in their book *Discourse in Late Modernity* (1999):

> There are two important aspects to reflexivity. First reflexivity is caught up in social struggle. Reflexively applied knowledges about a practice are positioned knowledges, knowledges generated from particular positions within a practice or outside of it (within theoretical practices), and they are both resources for and stakes in the struggle. Second … the reflexivity of practices has an irreducible discursive aspect, not only in the sense that all practices involve use of language to some degree … but also in the sense that discursive constructions of practices are themselves part of practices – that is what reflexivity means. (1999:26)

This potential for reflexivity to play a role in informing discursive constructions and extended notions of practice[34] may be taken as highly relevant to the Liberal Quaker case. In *Quaker Studies: An Overview* (2018), C. Wess Daniel specifically advocates that Quaker

[34] Discussed further in §2.5.1 and Chapter 4.

sociology has potentially the most to contribute in terms of informing an (internal) response to the current fractures faced by present day Quakers:

> I want to suggest that Quaker sociology is a research project that has developed just in time … Given the deep fracturing among Friends in the West, not only is unifying history a challenge, unifying theology is almost an impossibility … It is sociology, I believe, that has the capability to deliver not just unique contributions to the field of knowledge, but theories and data that can be useful to the ongoing evolution of the Quaker tradition … *Quaker* scholars … must continue to ask themselves … in what ways might these various sociological tools and approaches push the Quaker tradition forward into the future. (Daniels, 2018:105, emphasis original)

However, elsewhere Collins and Dandelion have both reflected upon how this 'flexible' and shifting (liquid) nature of Quaker identity and coherence-creation also makes it difficult to pin down satisfactory 'overarching' academic/sociological 'interpretations' of the Quaker community:

> … plaining, habitus, narrative … heterotopia … may indeed be relatively stable tropes manifested by Quakers across the centuries and I believe that there is plenty of evidence to suggest that they are. However, the point I wish to emphasize here is that there can be no single overarching interpretation by which we can come to understand Quaker identity … the practice of adolescent Friends … seems in various ways to confound generalisations of Quakers in general. Understanding or even describing the identity of individuals in the first years of the 21st century is a difficult, perhaps impossible task … (Collins, 2008:51)

> Liberal Quakerism … is far too flexible to be tied to any one particular form of coherence-creation, especially if they have been historically normative. Maybe Pilgrim's idea of heterotopia has actually begun to play with itself to the point where even it can no longer adequately describe the group. Certainly twenty-first century liberal Quakerism is reaching into new self-creations and interpretive identities … (Dandelion, 2008a:37)[35]

[35] Notably, both scholars have emphasised that a sense of coherent identity is difficult to classify, especially in the 21st century, i.e. what hypermodernity theorists would view as the hypermodern era.

This challenges the extent to which sociologists of Quakerism (who occupy a dual role as '*Quaker* scholars') can delineate understandings of the Quaker identity that may lend group members any satisfactory and/or stable resources for resolving their division or clearly defining their identity. Nevertheless, it should be noted that in their 2014 paper Collins and Dandelion explicitly draw a link between Quakers and liquid modernity not postmodernity, going on to say that: 'British Quakers see perpetual modulation of faith and practice as both logical and faithful' (2014:294), thus indicating that, despite the shifting and uncertain nature of Quakerism, Collins and Dandelion still view British Quakers as having a modernist commitment to truth derived through rational engagement. Moreover, Dandelion's above-quoted reference to 'new self-creations and interpretive identities' suggests that Quakers may still strive for some more tangible or positive formulations of their identity.

(2.5) Possible Internal Responses

This leads back to the question raised at the end of §2.4: if the dynamics of Liberal Quakerism are not to be understood in terms of a postmodern epistemological non-foundationalism or a fully pervasive heterogeneity a series of questions arise: What are the details of the responses and codifications developed by Liberal Quakers as permutations of their ongoing modulation? How should they be understood? Later chapters of this thesis seek to position these responses as attempting to lend the group some (temporary) basis for coherence and thereby constituting potential candidates for neo-orthodoxy. The final section of the present chapter will give some account of the nature of these responses in line with two streams: (1) reflexive-structural and (2) alteristic, before the subsequent

chapters further elucidate their manifestation within the group, including a more direct engagement with primary textual data.

(2.5.1) Reflexive-Structural Responses

The understanding of reflexive-structural responses utilised in this thesis was touched upon in Chapter 1 in conversation with Lindbeck's work, which internally/theologically employs the sociological formulations of such thinkers as Berger and Geertz, with an ecumenical aim towards resolving the division between Christian Churches.[36] Earlier in the present chapter this move was connected with the type of reflexivity seen in Gidden's position as key to the dynamics and/or structures of knowledge, i.e. in late modernity.[37] They may be seen to respond to the shifting and uncertain dynamics that reflexivity can motivate, by affirming that religious groups can opt to maintain their common internally coherent structures. In Lyotard's terms, a religion (such as Liberal Quakerism) may holistically be taken to be its own self-contained pragmatic language-game 'module' (1984:10). The present thesis argues[38] that, owing to a reflexive internal awareness of the shifting and diversifying dynamics of Liberal Quaker development, sections of the Quaker community are making this self-same move. To reiterate and clarify the move reflexive-structural responses make, is to claim that common internally coherent and/or cohering structures (often externally noted by academics – be they behavioural, historical, narrative or linguistic) can be maintained on the reflexive and pragmatic basis that they function to maintain a distinct and definable sense of the Liberal Quaker identity. This may in turn offer a framework

[36] See §1.4.1.4.
[37] See §2.4.
[38] Primarily in Chapters 3 and 4.

within which individuals may enrich their lives in therapeutic and aesthetic terms (Cupitt, 1985:266).

These include emic (internal) claims that fall in line with (and directly draw on) Dandelion's sociological formulations, i.e. that Liberal Quakers can (should) move to base their sense of a coherent identity on common practices and a behavioural creed.[39] However, in line with suggestions in Collins' work (along with Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999), this thesis advances the argument that the reflexivity of the Liberal Quaker group also allows for the development of discursive elements. These may be presented as markers of the Liberal Quaker identity and potential candidates for 'theological' neo-orthodoxy.

On this point, Collins' work has gone further in demarcating a credible understanding of the details and dynamics of the reflexive Quaker discursive landscape. This work contains implications for how Liberal Quakers may look to internally structure themselves along lines that go beyond orthopraxy. In the chapter 'Connecting Anthropology and Quakerism' (2002c), Collins initially draws a link between Quaker thought and that of the anthropologists Victor Turner and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Specifically, their formulations of human ritual and practices in terms of binary oppositions/tensions (2002c:88). In this regard, Lévi-Strauss especially may be located within the structuralist school of thought. Structuralism takes its primary inspiration from the structural linguistic thinking of Ferdinand de Saussure, who argued that language could be understood as internally structured – with meaning being via linguistic signs that are defined in opposition (in reference to the difference) to one another (Howarth, 2000:19). Lévi-Strauss took up

[39] Explored further in §4.1 and §4.2.

Saussure's thinking on linguistics and more explicitly applied it to the understanding of socio-cultural dynamics in his disciplinary field of anthropology (Howarth, 2000:23). He argued that humans have a proclivity to organise and codify the world in a meaningful way, leading to an understanding of human societies as working as symbolic systems with a deep, underlying structure (Howarth, 2000:24). Collins contends that, historically, Quakers have similarly structured their talk and understandings of religion in terms of such tensions. He outlines several tensions via which Quakers may seek to distinguish themselves from the outside world:

absence of status/status
absence of rank/distinctions of rank
sacredness/secularity
silence/speech
simplicity/complexity
equality/inequality
minimisation of sex differences/maximisation of sex differences
(Collins 2002c:88)

Following a similar line of argument in his earlier, doctoral work (1994), Collins indicates that issues and conflicts occurring within the group often get formulated in terms of such binary tensions, claiming that Quaker faith and practice is (and has been since its inception in the 1650s) 'characterised' by an 'exploration' of certain tensions between: e.g. 'inward/outward, inclusive/exclusive, sacred/profane, faith/practice, unity/diversity, individuality/corporate, tradition/change, equality/hierarchy' (2008:39; 1994:416). The formulation of the present issue in terms of theism–nontheism adds credence to the contention concerning the emic structuration of Quakerism (as does the common framing of the previous debate in terms of Christocentrism vs. universalism). The notion that Liberal Quakers may structure their movement via such binary tensions, not only in defining themselves in opposition to the external world but also in relation to internal conflict, fits

with the observation that Quakers are reflexively aware of and/or mimic academic formulations (2002c:87-91).

However, an internal self-awareness of such structured understandings also puts paid to the concept that such structuralist-type binary oppositions can act effectively to maintain Liberal Quakerism as a distinct and definable, coherent religious group. Many of the internal tensions noted by Collins (as quoted above) relate to whether Quakers are open to becoming more inclusive, to diversity and change – i.e. a possible breakdown in the distinction between the Quaker group and the outside world. Similar questions are also at play in the Christocentric–universalist debate and the theism–nontheism debate. This suggests that, if Liberal Quakers do have a tendency to define and structure themselves via such binary tensions (à la Lévi-Strauss), that tendency may be said to have turned in on itself – in a manner that resonates with Pilgrim's concept of Liberal Quaker dynamics (2008). This leads to a situation where these structuralist formulations no longer act as sufficient to define and codify (the increasingly complex make-up) of the Quaker group either etically or emically. Indeed, Collins later suggests that this formulation along structuralist Lévi-Straussian lines may be too simplistic to characterise the complexities and multifaceted dynamics that have developed in the Liberal Quaker 'discourse'. This may have partially motivated him in his later use of Bakhtin in his analysis (2002b:283).

Bakhtin offers an account of human dialogue and discourse which is diverse, shifting and permeated by 'sites of' tension, 'struggle' or, in Collins' term, 'negotiation' (2002c:92).[40]

[40] Bakhtin holds that all utterances – discursive and/or communicative – contain elements of what he terms 'polyphony' and 'heteroglossia', referring to the notion that cultural discourses and

Collins posits that Quaker discourse is characterised by a similar dynamic (2002b, 2002c). He positions the Quaker identity as being constituted by the negotiation between three different levels of discourse and/or narratives: prototypical (individual) discourses, vernacular (local) discourses and canonical (institutional) discourses (2002b, 2002c, 2004). These are continually being constructed and reconstructed – in a manner which (again) resonates with Giddens' understanding of the reflexive dynamism of 'hypermodernity'. This dialogical negotiation, in Collins' view, constitutes a certain Liberal Quaker 'genre'. In explaining what he means by this, he quotes from Bakhtin:

> Language is realized in the form of individual concrete utterances (oral and written) by participants in the various areas of human activity … Each separate utterance is individual, of course, but each sphere in which language is used develops its own *relatively stable types* of those utterances. These we call *speech genres.* (1986:60, cited in: Collins 2002b:291-92 emphasis original)

> Genres must be fully mastered in order to be manipulated freely … The better our command of genres, the more freely we employ them, the more fully and clearly we reveal our individuality in them …. (1986:80, cited in: ibid)

Collins also compares this with Bordieau's concept of learning a 'feel for the game' of one's given 'habitus' (2002b:292). This concept, that there is a certain genre or game of Quakerism, suggests that there may be potential reference points or routes for Quakers'

communicative acts are constructed through a mix of 'many voices' and traces of 'other languages'. Expressions made by individuals incorporate a plurality of different styles and assumptions and even directly appropriate terms and concepts drawn from the external discursive expressions and discursive-conceptual frameworks of others. The following excerpt demonstrates how this leads him to an antisystematic view of human discourse as continual, diverse and shifting:
' … at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form ... Therefore languages do not exclude each other, but rather intersect with each other in many different ways.' (Bakhtin, 1992:291)

understanding. This could also represent a sense of commonality and potentially a sense of 'orthodoxy'.

Concerning the issue of Liberal Quaker orthodoxy, of particular note is Collins' understanding of the canonic level of Quaker discourse:

> *Quaker Faith and Practice* constitutes … a collection of 'authoritative utterances'. Other canonic texts might include the Journal of George Fox and the Epistles and Minutes of Yearly Meeting – both are excerpted widely in *Quaker Faith and Practice* – and 'classic' histories such as those by Braithwaite (1923) and Jones (1921) … the canon … vaguely defined also includes … the form of worship … it comes nearest to providing a Quaker ideology … the flag that Quakers, in spite of their differences, can unify behind. (2002b:287)

Here again similarities can be seen between the items Collins places within the canonical level of Quaker discourse and what Dandelion places as key representations of Quaker 'orthodoxy' and mechanisms of coherence creation – i.e. *Quaker Faith and Practice* (along with associated texts) and the Quaker form of worship (Dandelion 1996:20). The difference is that, in light of this, Collins does not simply formulate Quaker approaches towards normative belief in terms of an 'absolute perhaps', but rather gives a 'thickened' understanding of how this might manifest and include discursive elements. By supplementing the concept of a Quaker habitus with a consideration of communally constructed narratives or discourses, Collins extends the notion of Quaker communal practice from Dandelion's conceptual focus on behaviour (2002a:152). Consequently, Collins positions Quakerism as constructing a discursive landscape. This commonly constructed discursive landscape, whilst protean, works to shift Liberal Quakers towards some points of commonality (based around vernacular and canonical discourses/texts), thereby providing a

basis around which they can form a sense of common identity (2002b;2004). As previously noted, Collins' work facilitates an understanding of Liberal Quaker identity not solely as defined by 'constraints' around behaviour but as constructive 'creative and imaginative endeavour' (2002a:158). Again, this positive creative dynamic of Quaker narrative/discursive structures and reflexivity lends potential resources for the emic construction of a more discursive neo-orthodoxy.

Grant's delineations around Liberal Quakerism's structure and identity maintenance[41] also share some notable parallels with Collins' delineation and concern for narratives. Grant's deployment of Lindbeck to conceptualise Quakerism as being structured like a language is comparable to Collins' attention to discursive/narrative structures. In relation to Collins, Grant's advocating of Quaker coherence-construction operating around a concept of 'fluency' may be compared to Collins' notion of vernacular and/or canonical texts/discourses working to influence and imbue a commonality amongst the autobiographical stories of individual Quakers. Collins formulates Quakers as continually constructing and re-constructing stories and/or narratives, whereas Grant focuses on the Quaker construction of lists/list structures which present and – via grammatical-type rules – bracket a diversity of expressions of belief taken as permissible within liberal Quakerism (Collins, 2008:52; Grant, 2014:110-123, 230).[42] Collins' framing of the structure in terms of texts indicates a desire to emphasise that discourses and interpretations within Quakerism can shift and proliferate – in line with some more poststructuralist considerations around the nature of discourse and 'communicative acts' (Collins, 2002b:290; 2004:100). He

[41] See §1.3.3.
[42] Fluency constructs and/or lends a common grammar and/or second-order rules governing and bracketing the construction of lists.

explicitly states: 'the same text ... is never the same text twice' (2002b:290). Grant's framing of Quaker structure as a language (in linguistic terms) puts more emphasis on the concept that Quakers (while allowing for diversity within list-structures) do construct and/or sustain a sense of 'fluency' (2014:230).

Grant's use of Lindbeck in what is intended to be an external academic formulation of Quaker language use is revealing concerning a facet of how the reflexivity of academic critique might manifest. Grant is drawing upon an internal theological model reflexively constructed via an engagement with sociological, anthropological and philosophical formulations to give an external academic analysis of a group. The present thesis argues that this type of thought is now being applied internally by Quakers, plausibly to some degree influenced by Grant, a '*Quaker* scholar' (Daniels, 2018). This is indicative of the extent of the spiralling nature of the reflexivity of knowledge and meaning in late modernity (Giddens, 1991:15) and the resultant disturbances that can occur around the insider/outsider divide (Collins, 2002c:91-92).

Dandelion has indicated that his instinctive response to Collins and Grant is to think that they are essentially identifying manifestations of 'absolute perhaps' (personal communication during supervision discussions). This response has appeal, as Collins does characterise Quaker narratives as being in an ever-shifting process (2008:52), and Grant (2014) looks to place the degree of theological diversity and 'perhapsness' as structurally bracketed (and quasi-cohered) via the practice of list making. Thus, these formulations are seemingly not entirely at odds with Dandelion's concept of Quaker 'perhapsness'. However, they raise questions concerning the degree to which this 'perhapsness' is absolute. The

degree to which these structural considerations actually succeed in imposing limitations on the diversification or diversity of Quaker theology – lending a basis for some boundaries, commonality and/or coherence – beyond that of a prescription for an openness to diversity (i.e. the absolute perhaps) – is primarily discussed in the next chapter. However, they are suggestive that the particulars of how Quakers construct a sense of common identity (perhaps also theology) are more complex than Dandelion's formulations explicitly represent.

Certainly, Dandelion's initial concern expressed in his doctoral thesis, that the permissive and liberal attitude taken towards belief may disturb the more conservative approach towards behaviour (orthopraxy) and lead to the complete fragmentation of Liberal Quakerism as a religious group, seems overly simplistic (1996:323). The relationship between Quaker 'behavioural culture' and 'theological culture' is not as simple as that the attitude of theological permissiveness exerts pressure for the group to be less conservative around practice (ibid.). Rather, Quaker behaviour is open to being 'theologised' in other ways. Again, the work of Collins and Grant is indicative that notions of communal practice can be extended to include more discursive elements and potential resources for theologisation.

It is in regard to this potential line of development that the thesis considers reflexive-structural responses which involve the possibility of more discursive elements. The thesis argues that in response to the challenges of their diverse theological culture/discursive landscape, and more pointedly of the theism–nontheism debate, Quakers are internally bringing in similar formulations; that is, ones concerning extended notions of Quaker

practice and/or claims that they can in a self-aware (reflexive) manner act to maintain a common sense of Liberal Quaker identity. This is with reference to communally negotiated historical, narrative, idiomatic and/or dialogical structures. Indeed, Collins registers a view 'both as social scientist and Quaker' that the process of dialogical-discursive-narrative negotiation he delineates may 'revitalize' the group.

> Meeting narratives have always been, at least to some extent, interwoven with those threads spun in the context of wider society. Writing both as social scientist and Quaker, I believe it is this process which, if sustained, may yet revitalize what remains of an extraordinary group. (2008:52)

The details and demonstrative work are primarily the focus of Chapter 4, which involves an engagement with Quaker approaches to the issue of values and Quaker testimony (from both 'theists' and nontheists), along with textual data drawn from popular Quaker publications and blogs (e.g. Daniels, 2015a; Dutton, 2012; Russ, 2017; Wood, 2016a, 2016b), which the chapter argues internally promote a comparable model for Quaker 'renewal', with some exhibiting direct influence from Lindbeck and perhaps Grant.

To an extent, these reflexive-structural responses can be construed as falling into agreement with an element of the Quaker nontheists (i.e. Boulton–Cupitt nontheists – those who hold a view of religion as existing in humanly constructed linguistic-type structures). The connection between this species of nontheist views and reflexive-structural responses is explored further in the next two chapters. However, those Quakers utilising reflexive-structural responses more pointedly to try and resolve the theism–nontheism divide differ from the Boulton-Cupitt nontheists primarily in two senses: (1) they remain more neutral on the question of whether there may be something of divine ontological

content outside of these structures; (2) they more pointedly promote the importance of maintaining the common structures (often over and above that of the behavioural creed). Nontheists influenced by Cupitt seem more open concerning the extent to which they can freely draw on and play with these communally constructed structures to inform their individual religious journeys (Cupitt, 1985:266-267). Therefore, they may be less concerned with the necessity of maintaining these structures as common. Indeed, they may be seen to push a more expansive sense of perhaps-ness. On this issue, in his work Collins is careful to point out that under a Bakhtinian understanding:

> Dialogue's drive to meaning does not lead to a Hegelian unity; in the Quaker meeting as in Bakhtin, there is no one meaning being striven for: 'the world is a vast congeries of contested meanings, a heteroglossia so varied that no single term capable of unifying its diversifying energies is possible' (Holquist 1990:24... (Collins 2002b:295)

In this regard, those Quakers developing internal reflexive-structural responses (with discursive elements) may be seen to depart from Collins. They are promoting a claim that a common discursive structure, to a degree, can and should be reflexively and stably maintained. However, in line with Collins' analysis, the attitudes of some Quakers (including Boulton–Cupitt nontheists) still seems liable to put pressure on this type of response. The Quaker theologian Ben Wood relates on his blog post 'Quakerism Without Metaphysics': 'Doubtless there will still be some Friends who feel hemmed in by the very idea of some kind of a shared story' (Wood, 2016b). This dynamic speaks to the astuteness of the claims of Dandelion and Collins in 'Transition as Normative: Liberal Quakerism as Liquid Religion' (2014) that the defining feature of the Quaker theological/belief culture and/or discursive landscape has become one of transition and permanent change. However, the emergence

of reflexive-structural responses suggests that some Quakers have an internal awareness of their group's diversification and mode of development. They do not respond to it simply by validating that state of permanent transition as normative, but rather on a self-aware level try to define boundaries and a common Quaker identity/culture. The degree to which this is likely to be successful – or how stably these structures can be reflexively constructed and maintained – is difficult to discern. However, the present thesis holds that, considering current discussions internal to the Quaker community, such responses should be noted as an emergent permutation within the group's development, feeding into potential candidates for 'neo-orthodoxy'.

(2.5.2) Alteristic Responses

Like reflexive-structural responses, alteristic responses can be seen to have emerged in answer to the diversifying, shifting dynamics of the Liberal Quaker discursive landscape. They may therefore also be positioned as self-aware and/or reflexive of these dynamics. However, they differ from reflexive-structural responses in that they point towards a view of religio-ethical experiences that may explain, underpin and incorporate the new extent of Liberal Quaker (a)theological diversity. This is endeavoured in theological/phenomenological/religio-ethical terms, rather than reflexively appealing to a common structure separate from individual religious experiences.

(2.5.2.1) Bakhtin's 'Philosophical Anthropology' as an Alteristic Ethic and Potential Religious Resource

For an understanding of these alteristic responses it is again useful to look at Collins' work tying in Liberal Quakerism with a Bakhtinian understanding of discourse. Collins is clear that Bakhtin's work does not 'predispose one to accept religion … as an external force', or that Quakers in the development of their discursive landscape are building towards any stable and/or definitively true account of Quakerism (2002b:296). However, at the end of his chapter on Bakhtin and the Quakers, Collins notes that Bakhtin developed a 'philosophical anthropology' underlying his account of human dialogue and/or discourse, revolving around a 'consciousness of otherness' (2002b:294). The Bakhtinian commentator Michael Holquist (2002[1990]) labels this 'philosophical anthropology' as 'dialogism'. This refers to the 'interconnected set of concerns' that motivate Bakhtin's work and reflect the central position of dialogue in his project (2002:15). Holquist places the dialogue as the dominant concept that informs Bakhtin's epistemological assumptions and academic project. He describes it as the: ' … obvious master key to the assumptions that guided Bakhtin's work throughout his whole career', going to say that: ' … all Bakhtin's writings are animated and controlled by the principle of dialogue' (ibid.).

Bakhtin's emphasis on dialogue reflects an appreciation of the significance of 'otherness' or alterity. Dialogical interaction – i.e. interaction with others and/or otherness – is placed by Bakhtin as the basis on which 'the very capacity to have consciousness' rests (2002:18). The meaning of one's own identity is only made sense of in relation '(or in dialogue with)' the other (Collins, 2002b:294). It is this appreciation for otherness that feeds into Bakhtin's

framing of the dynamics of discourse as multifaceted, and into the overall anti-systematic nature of his 'dialogist' thought. However, it also motivates him to take the position that discourses develop in an interconnected way with some sense of continuity, as he places discursive landscapes as emerging out of a dialogical and 'mutually dependent' relation between others – between self and other.

This dialogism is not necessarily connected with a sense of religiosity related to 'an external force'; what one might typically relate to 'theistic' conceptions of an ontological God. Bakhtin's focus on dialogue may be more reliably related to reciprocal 'mutually dependent relationship[s]' (Collins, 2002b:295) between people. This has led commentators such as Caryl Emmerson to characterise Bakhtin's underpinning philosophy as a form of 'humanism' (Emmerson, 1994:296, cited in: Barta et al., 2001:1), this occasionally being placed in direct contrast to the 'death of the subject' ostensibly typical of post-structuralist and/or postmodernist thought: 'It is with 'post-structuralism's nemesis a banal humanism […] that Bakhtin's values lay' (ibid.) – an issue that will be returned to shortly.

Concerning the potential for sources of religiosity in Bakhtin, Bakhtin's thought has previously been connected to the theologian Martin Buber's concept of the I–Thou relation, which Buber developed as an explicitly religious concept (Collins, 2002b:295; Friedman, 2001; Perlina, 1984).[43] Indeed, Bakhtin conveyed his indebtedness to Buber concerning his

[43] In his seminal work *I and Thou* (2013 [1937]) Buber makes a distinction between two ways an individual may relate to otherness: via an I–It relationship which takes the form of a subject–object relation which is 'nonmutual', involving attempts to rigidly codify or utilise another (as a means to an end); or, alternatively, via an I–Thou relationship which is 'mutual' and 'open', involving a recognition the other's subjectivity, agency and autonomy. He positions God as directly correspondent to his concept 'eternal Thou' with which one can only enter into an 'unreserved dialogical relationship' (2013:92). Buber holds that: 'Every particular *Thou* is glimpsed through the

thinking on dialogue.[44] Accordingly, the present thesis holds that the ethic towards otherness or alterity found in Bakhtin's thought can be related to religious or theological notions. Furthermore, it argues that some Liberal Quakers are developing analogous positions in response to their diverse, shifting, and at points conflicting discursive landscape: a landscape with dynamics themselves analogous to Bakhtin's philosophical account of discourse. On this point it is worth noting that Collins posits that Bakhtinian analysis may be internally appealing to Quakers, saying that it 'appeals to both the Quaker and anthropologist in [him]' (2002b:295). However, it is unclear whether he is referring to a Bakhtinian view of dynamics of discourse on a group level, the underlining 'philosophical anthropology', or both.

(2.5.2.2) Synergisable Theological Formulations: The Last Word and an Alteristic Ethic Within an Open Eschatology

In elucidating the dynamics of this type of response this thesis looks to supplement this illustrative/comparative consideration of Bakhtin's alteristic and/or humanist 'philosophical anthropology' with some additional synergiseable formulations, more explicitly theological, yet still within the Liberal Quaker discursive landscape.

Bakhtin's philosophical view of discourse has previously been understood in terms of there being 'no last words' (Bell and Gardiner, 1998). This may be contrasted and compared with

eternal *Thou;* by means of every particular *Thou* the primary word addresses the eternal *Thou*' (2013:51). In other words, it is both through their being a notion of an eternal (rather than transient) I–Thou relation that one is able to relate to a finite other as a *Thou*, and (somewhat paradoxically) it is through one's finite *Thou* relationships that one encounters the eternal *Thou* (i.e. God).

[44] 'But Buber is a philosopher. And I am very much indebted to him. In particular for the idea of dialogue. Of course, this is obvious to anyone who reads Buber.' (Bakhtin, in: Friedman 2001:25)

relatively established ideas in academic theology relating to the 'last word'. In her book *Keeping God's Silence: Towards a Theological Ethics of Communication* (2004), the Quaker theologian Rachel Muers explicates this with reference to the work on Bonhoeffer in his *Ethics* ([1949] cited in Muers 2004:81-82). Bonhoeffer delineates his concept of the 'last word' by structuring the world via an ultimate/penultimate distinction. The ultimate refers to the 'last word', 'the natural and necessary end' which 'implies a complete breaking off of everything that precedes it … ' but which is also ' … always preceded by something penultimate' (ibid.). The penultimate is taken to be 'everything that precedes the ultimate' (2004:87). Under Bonhoeffer's theological understanding this 'last word' is to be an act that belongs exclusively to God. Moreover, it is explicitly framed in Christian terms since this final reconciliation is seen to be 'achieved through Christ and the resurrection' (2004:86).

This may seem to be at odds with Bakhtin's account of human discourse as a continual, pluralistic dialogue, as God is placed as the 'last word', ending, fulfilling and containing the plural human discourse. Indeed, there are indications of Liberal Quakers similarly responding to such a concept of an open-ended alteristic ethic by noting that they may appeal to divine or theistic ontology which contains their engagement with communal diversity.[45] However, as this thesis argues via an examination of the theism–nontheism debate, the reliability with which Quakers can make such appeal itself seems under tension.

Furthermore, the division between the theological framing of God as the 'last word' on human practices and discourse, and the Bakhtinian view of human discourse as resisting such 'closure', may be taken as more superficial than first appears. Bakhtin's thought does,

[45] See §5.1.3.1.

however, contain the concept of 'the superadresse', positioned as a concept people hold every time they enter into dialogue relating to ' … a particular image in which they model the belief they will be understood'. It is this 'faith that we will be understood somehow, sometime, by somebody' (Holquist, cited in: Friedman 2001:29), that the Bakhtinian commentators Holquist and Maurice Friedman (2001:29) place as the closest notion Bakhtin's work had to a concept of God – albeit one that lends itself to being framed as an imagined ideal rather than a definite true belief-claim. Moreover, the theological positioning of human interactions as taking place within 'the penultimate', with the ultimate, last word deferred to God, may potentially be held to concord with more Bakhtinian concepts of the last word being continually delayed, within a 'liquid' community such as the Liberal Quakers. Via this line of thinking there is potential for agreement amongst Liberal Quakers about how to engage and be in communion as they live the Quaker life via a type of alteristic ethic towards others, where what could be framed as eschatological questions of whether or not human endeavours are closed by the last word of an ontological divinity (i.e. God) are left open and deferred. Indeed, in her contributions to the theism–nontheism think tank Muers can be seen making moves that parallel such developments in thought, emphasising concepts such as Quakers being good companions to each other on an open journey (Muers, in: Rowlands, 2017:67).[46]

[46] Further discussed in §5.2.3.

(2.5.2.3) Alternative Developments of an Alteristic Ethic as a Potential Religio-Ethical Resource: Deconstruction, Derrida, Levinas and Bauman

It is also worth supplementing the present thesis' consideration of this potential development of an alteristic ethic by a comparison with developments in poststructuralist and/or deconstructive thought, primarily that of Derrida and his later commentators. This is useful as a point of comparison and contrast in part because it strengthens the argument that fields of discourse that permit a large degree of fluidity, de-structuring and pluralisation may feed into such alteristic responses. However, it also has utility in that the later development of ethical and/or political dimensions of deconstructive thought go further in explicitly connecting this alteristic ethic underlying human discourse to: (1) phenomenological/experiential dimensions; (2) aspects of faith and religiosity often specifically positioned to disturb the theist–atheist binary divide; (3) political and/or communal tensions regarding how a community accommodates others and difference whilst still maintaining its sense as a community; and (4) a radical concern for nonviolence. All of these are highly relevant to the Liberal Quaker case. A consideration of the developments in the deconstructive 'school of thought' facilitates more direct and detailed points of comparison, thereby better illuminating dimensions in the current development of Liberal Quaker dynamics.

Similar to Bakhtin's philosophical account of human discourse, Derrida's deconstructive thought views all semiotic structures as subject to shifting and diversifying interpretations where senses of meaning continually diverge from one another and a final definitive meaning is constantly deferred. Derrida developed his thought via a departure from

Saussurean structuralism's view that semiotic (linguistic) signs gain their meaning by being defined in relation and opposition to one another (Derrida, 2016 [1976]:12-48). Derrida's project sought to disturb assumptions concerning the extent to which under a structuralist account meaning could be maintained as locatable and stable. Derrida argued that, since the meaning of signs (or signifiers) was constituted via their relation to each other, one could not pin down one final meaning because that very meaning was entangled in a continual chain, or perhaps more accurately nexus, of signs bringing in different definitions and/or connotations. Crucially, he challenged the extent to which an individual's speech could be privileged as a site of ultimate meaning, as Saussure had contended (Howarth, 2000:36-37). Derrida argued that the very thing that enables an individual to communicate to others lies in the movement of this mixed nexus of signs (signifiers) and connotations. This led him to contend that the dynamics of all communicative acts were more analogous to the general thinking around written texts, i.e. always being subject to interpretation at a distance rather than there being the possibility for a speaker to authoritatively clarify and define their final meaning (Derrida, 2016:7-8).

To denote this underlying 'dynamic' Derrida coined the term 'différance'. The term playfully draws on the French word 'différer', which has the dual meaning of both 'to differ' and 'to defer'. It is also intentionally homophonic with (and therefore hidden within) the term 'différence', partly to emphasise Derrida's view of its being the not entirely graspable/definable or easily detectable morphing and movement of socio-textual-linguistic structures (Derrida, 1982:7-8; Howarth, 2000:40). It is the movement of différance that Derrida conceives as an unstable, one might say quasi-structure, that actually makes the construction of communicative acts and discourse possible (Derrida 1982:9; Howarth,

2000:41). It is différance that plays a key role in constituting the conscious experience of the 'decentred subject'. It also informs the movement of deconstruction Derrida envisions as constantly at play in 'all the structures of meaning' (or texts), be they literary: '"economic", "historical", [or] socio-institutional' (Derrida, 1988:148).

The degree to which Derrida is epistemologically/ontologically correct in his account of différance as, in Graham Ward's term, a 'quasi-transcendental' idea (2003:83) underlying all dynamics of communication and discourse, is outside of the scope and interests of the present thesis. However, given Derrida's account of human discursive structures as subject to a proliferation of diverse interpretations, fissures and shifting, the thesis holds that, like Bakhtin's account, Derrida's deconstructive account of discourse may be analogically useful for elucidating the dynamics of Liberal Quakerism. Additionally, as indicated, given that Derridean thought may be thought of as an internal philosophical 'postmodernist' (and/or post-structuralist) position, the development of his deconstructive thought (as with Bakhtin's philosophical thought) is apt to lend comparative resources for understanding the internal dynamics of how Liberal Quaker views may develop.

The thesis' line of thinking may be clarified in reference to one of Collins' descriptions concerning '[t]he lack of closure that characterises the Quaker tradition' (2002c:93), a tradition that Collins has previously analogously formulated in broad textual terms, and that Grant has understood as operating as analogous to a language (Collins, 2002b:290; Grant, 2014:10). Deconstructive thought inhabits a philosophical/hermeneutic position which advocates approaching textual-linguistic-semiotic structures in a manner that 'perpetually breaches … closure' (Critchley, 2014 [1992]:30). In both these cases 'closure' may be

generally understood as there being well-defined boundaries or limits concerning what belongs within a given tradition (Critchley, 2014:20). Therefore, exploring the development of Derrida's thought offers resources for exploring trajectories of thought in contexts where there is an internal commitment to resisting such closure, providing comparative resources for edifying the thesis' exploration of Liberal Quaker development.

Sociological theories like Giddens' (1991) around hypermodernity may offer a compelling way of framing the development of the dynamics of uncertainty and shifting on an external level and/or macro-social scale. However, Derrida and his commentators did move to reflect on what prevented deconstruction from falling in nihilistic 'free-play' (Kearney, 2004:154) and the results of these reflections are valuable for considering Quakers' reflections on their own fluidity/liquidity, even if there may not be consensus on what informs the movement and flux of their respective discursive/semiotic landscapes.

Returning to consider deconstruction (i.e. Derridean thought) with relation to the discourse theory and/or philosophy of Bakhtin, Emmerson's earlier claim that Bakhtin with his 'banal humanism' may be positioned as the 'nemesis' of 'post-structuralism' (Emmerson, 1994:296, cited in: Barta et al., 2001:1) seems to lie in the contention that Bakhtin maintained a concept of the dialogical, this 'mutually dependent' relationship between subjects underpinning his account of the movement of human discourse and structures of meaning. This may be opposed to the 'death' or at least de-centring of the subject seen in deconstruction (Benhabib, 2011), alongside the perception of Derrida's earlier work as primarily concerned with the play of textual structures and 'rhetoric' rather than human 'social life' and 'lived experience' (Barta et al., 2001:5). However, in responding to

Emmerson, Peter Barta cautions that Bakhtin's humanism is not exactly that of the individualist – one might say modern rationalistic – type, precisely because ' … for Bakhtin, consciousness is always linguistically [and dialogically] constituted', bringing him closer to the 'concerns of postmodern thought' (Barta et al., 2001:2). Moreover, Barta also points out that in his later work, in the later development of his project, Derrida became more 'politically committed' (Barta et al., 2001:5). This brings Derrida comparatively closer to the shape and development of both Bakhtin's philosophical thought and that of the Liberal Quakers in their responses to their current context.

The later development referred to by Barta, primarily seen in Derrida's output in the 1990s, has often been identified and explicitly referred to as his political or 'ethical turn' (Glendinning, 2011:78). During this 'turn', Derrida attempted to develop what the present thesis terms an 'alteristic ethic'. In response to accusations that his philosophy was only committed to 'nihilism' and 'free play', he increasingly claimed that deconstruction is both motivated by and further facilitates an ethics of 'openness towards the other' (Derrida, in: Kearney, 2004:154-155). Such claims reveal a view that there is an ethical duty not to codify or categorise the other into a single system of interpretation/comprehension:

> I totally refuse the label of nihilism that has been ascribed to me … Deconstruction is … an openness towards the other … (ibid.)
>
> Deconstruction certainly entails a moment of affirmation … I cannot conceive of a radical critique, which would not be ultimately motivated by some sort of affirmation, acknowledged or not... deconstruction is, in itself, a positive response to an alterity which necessarily calls, summons or motivates it. Deconstruction is therefore vocation – a response to a call. (Derrida, in: Kearney, 2004:149)

Derrida's view of ethics was significantly influenced by the thinking of Emmanuel Levinas, a point compellingly argued by Simon Critchley in *The Ethics of Deconstruction* (2014[1992]). Levinas was friends with and partially influenced by the thought of Buber (Atterton et al., 2004). However, Levinas may be seen to depart from Buber when he emphasises that the self's relation to the other is one of infinite responsibility; it is ultimately asymmetrical, unconditional and non-reciprocal. For Levinas (and Derrida) it is the infinite asymmetrical demand the other places on the self which informs the phenomenology of ethics, an ethical experience:

> The fundamental experience … is the experience of the Other. It is experience *par excellence* … the Other out of proportion with the power and freedom of the I. The disproportion between the Other and the self is precisely moral consciousness. Moral consciousness is not an experience of values, but an access to external being: external being is, *par excellence* the Other. (Levinas, 1997 [1990]:293)

– a sentiment Derrida affirms: 'Disassociation, separation, is the condition of my relation to the other … It is a relation in which the other remains absolutely transcendent …' (Derrida, in: Caputo, 1997:14)

Derrida makes the connection between this alteristic ethic of openness to the other and potential understandings of experiences of faith and/or religiosity more explicit. In *The Gift of Death* (2008 [1999]), one of his works that directly engage with the subject of religion, one chapter is given the title of his claim that '*tout autre est tout autre*'. This is generally translated as either 'every other (one) is every (bit) other' or 'every other is wholly other' (2008:82; Lawlor, 2018). Thus, via the Levinasian unconditional ethic Derrida attributes to alterity, he may be seen to break down the distinction between religious experience of a

divine other and ethical experiences of encountering and engaging with human others. Derrida makes this synthesis of religious and ethical experiences within a Levinasian understanding of an ethic of alterity explicit, saying that:

> … in taking into account … the absolute alterity obtaining in relations with another human, Levinas is no longer able to distinguish between the infinite alterity of God and that of every human: his ethics is already a religion. In both cases the border between the ethical and the religious becomes more than problematic …. (2008:84)

In a later interview Derrida also makes it clearer that this universal religio-ethical experience of openness towards the other is phenomenologically informed by a feature of uncertainty, or what he elsewhere framed as 'undecidability' (1992:24-25; see also Lawlor, 2018; Critchley, 2014:42). Derrida draws a link between uncertainty over God's existence and the uncertainty over whether the other, be they 'divine' or otherwise, will offer one a response and/or reciprocity:

> … When you name God you call God, that's your call; it's an empty call … Were I sure that when I call there is someone, someone real, at the other end, I wouldn't call. The skeptical person is a part of the faithful person. If God were really present to me, as a certain, as a sure, presence, I wouldn't call … the example of naming or calling Kevin. Calling him has the same structure as calling to God. And that's why faith is at once an exceptional, unique experience and something very common, universal in a certain way. (Derrida, in: Sherwood and Hart, 2004:38)

Thus, Derrida's commentary on religo-ethical experiences looks to break down the divide between ethical experiences and experiences of the divine, and the divide between theism and atheism (Gutting, 2014). This may add credence to the contention that such a line of thought may be appealing to those Liberal Quakers looking to resolve (break down) the binary theism–nontheism divide (Rowlands, 2017:2,55,80).

Derrida's framing of the religio-ethical experiences as being informed by a certain 'undecidability' – linked with one's obligation not to codify the other (Critchley, 2014:42; Derrida, 1992:24-25) – may also be compared to Dandelion's concept of 'absolute perhaps'. However, Dandelion suggests the 'absolute perhaps' as a prescribed attitude that may lend the diverse Liberal Quaker theological culture some sense of normativity/coherence (2004, 2008a:33-36), whereas Derrida is suggesting that such an attitude of perhapsness is in fact constitutive of the animation of faith and religio-ethical experiences, saying: 'It is in … the suspension of belief, the suspension of the position of God as a thesis, that faith appears.' (Derrida, in: Sherwood and Hart, 2004:47). Derrida is yet clearer in equating his understanding of religio-ethical experience to an 'experience of the perhaps' in *Specters of Marx* (2006 [1994]):

> … wherever deconstruction is at stake it would be a matter of linking an *affirmation* … to an experience of the impossible, which can only be a radical experience of the perhaps. (Derrida, 2006:42)

It seems reasonable to posit that a similar development of framing an attitude of perhaps as both religio-ethical and as constitutive of religious experiences, may appeal to Liberal Quakers. It could emerge as one aspect of how the absolute perhaps may be reflected upon and manifest within the group. This is given their diverse (a)theological culture and the group's initial emphasis on the primacy of experience.

Derrida's view of ethics and alterity also links in with concerns around forming community. Particularly the tension between a community's aspiration to be welcoming to others and new members with potentially divergent views, thereby incorporating a degree of diversity, and the desire to maintain a definable sense of the community into which others can be

welcomed (Caputo, 1997:111). This seems close to the tensions Liberal Quakers have grappled with around the question of Christocentrism vs. universalism and now the theism–nontheism debate. Derrida preferred to frame this antinomy around the concept of 'hospitality', in the sense that communities/individuals are called to be hospitable to others whilst still maintaining a position from which they can host (ibid.). In John Caputo's *Deconstruction in a Nutshell* (1997) commentary on 'The Villanova Roundtable', in which Derrida participated, Caputo places such a concept of hospitality as central to the impetus of deconstruction, saying:

> If one was intent on making deconstruction look respectable, it would not be a distortion to say that deconstruction is to be understood as a form of hospitality, that deconstruction *is* hospitality, which means the welcoming of the other. (1997:109, emphasis original)

However, this emphasis on 'the welcoming of the other' does not mean that development amongst deconstructive thinkers neglects the aspiration to form a community. The relevant chapter in Caputo's commentary is entitled 'Community Without Community' and quotes from Derrida in the second paragraph that: 'There is doubtless this irrepressible desire for a "community" to form but also for it to know its limit – and for its limit to be its *opening*' (in 1997:107 emphasis original). Caputo ends the chapter by considering this tension in terms of 'a weak community'. The desire a for a community to be continually open, welcoming and/or incorporating others alongside the impossibility of resolving this antinomy, is framed as an aspiration, informing a certain experience or phenomenology:

> … a weak community … demands considerable strength, for it would be required to maintain a sense of a certain community even while welcoming the stranger, to remain master of the house while making the other feel at home … a community that is forbidden to collect unity is *the* impossible, '*the experience and experiment of the possibility of the impossible.*' (Caputo 1997:124 emphasis original)

This appeal to an experientially informing, ultimately impossible ethic towards hospitality may again be seen to have resonances with Liberal Quaker sensibilities, along with having potential import for internal notions of religiosity. In *On Religion* (2001), Caputo uses the same terminology to describe 'the very quality that defines religion for' him:

> Human experience, I am contending, comes alive as experience by and through the impossible. Experience is really experience … only when pushed to the limit of the possible, to the edge of the impossible … this experience of the impossible is the very quality that defines religion for me. (Caputo 2001:109)

Notably, Derrida himself also connects this framing of a religio-ethical experience being informed by undecidability and/or an 'impossible' hospitality to notions of eschatology or 'messianism' (2006:59):

> … this absolutely undetermined messianic hope … this eschatological relation to the to-come of an event … of an alterity that cannot be anticipated. Awaiting … what one does not expect yet or any longer, hospitality without reserve … the *arrivant* … who … will not be asked to commit to the domestic contracts of any welcoming power … *just* opening which renounces … any right … messianic opening to what is coming, that is, to the event that cannot be awaited *as such*, or recognized in advance therefore, to the event as the foreigner itself, to her or to him for whom one must leave an empty place … such a hospitality without reserve is the impossible itself. (2006:81)

This can be connected with the discussion in §2.5.2.3 above concerning theological concepts of the penultimate and the ultimate (last word) and Bakhtin's model of the 'superadresse' potentially acting as an imagined reference point for 'the last word'. The discussion placed both these formulations as potentially relatable to concepts of an open eschatology. Derrida is more explicit in connecting his ethic of hospitality – understood as also relating to secular formulations of polity and community – to such an eschatological openness. Concurrently

he may be seen to position it as potentially informing quasi-religious/quasi-mystical experiences. On Derrida's relevance to theological mysticism, the theologian George Pattison has written:

> … it is … [the] wrenching of the question of negative theology away from epistemology and towards eschatology that I take to be the singular service of Derrida's later quasi-religious turn.
>
> If this opens up a line along which we can both philosophically and theologically rethink … such rethinking will no longer be a mere return of the same one universal mystical experience … it is removing mysticism from the logic of the eternal return and despatching it into the open and anxious realm of historical life. (Pattison, 2016 [2013]:28)

This move towards viewing the mystical experience as based on the 'open and anxious realm of historical life' rather than on 'one universal mystical experience' may again be related to Liberal Quakers' move away from universalist assumptions around their religious experience and towards Dandelion's concept of an 'absolute perhaps' and a prescription towards 'constant seeking' (2008a:33). It may also be related to Liberal Quakers' conceiving of themselves as a community on a 'journey' together (Muers, in: Rowlands, 2017:67). Investigating this line of development may add to Dandelion's sociological formulation an illumination of how an attitude of 'absolute perhaps' as a reaction to intra-(a)theological diversity may internally shift – essentially a shift from being seen as an epistemological claim to being framed as a constitutive part of Liberal Quaker spirituality.

Concepts of this type of ethic of alterity may also be related to Groot's concept of liquid religions or 'communities "lite"' as derived from Bauman (2008:288). In his earlier publication *Postmodern Ethics* (1993), Bauman argues that the de-structuring seen in

postmodernity (and/or later liquid modernity) may open the way for an engagement with the 'human ethical capacity without illusions' (1993:blurb). In his delineation of the nature of the 'human ethical capacity' he directly engages with Levinas (1993:47-53,69-77,84-87). In that book at least, he commits to a view of ethics as unconditional responsibility, a view animated by the anxiety and impossibility of its ever being perfectly applied; as he says: 'Moral responsibility is unconditional and infinite, and it manifests itself in the constant anguish of not manifesting itself enough' (1993:250). In *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1991 [1989]), Bauman goes as far as describing Levinas as the 'greatest moral philosopher of the twentieth century' (1991:214). Certainly at this point in the development of his thought he subcribed to a Levinasian-type view of ethical responsibility and/or moral consciousness as unconditional and incodifiable:

> Most emphatically, *my responsibility is unconditional* … This existential responsibility … has nothing to do with contractual obligation. It has nothing in common either with my calculation of reciprocal benefit. It does not need the sound or idle expectation of reciprocity, of 'mutuality of intentions', of the other rewarding my reponsibility with his own. Becoming responsible … is my affair, and mine only. 'Intersubjective relation is a non-symmetrical relation … I am responsible for the Other without waiting for reciprocity, were I to die for it. Reciprocity is *his* affair. (1991:183, emphasis original)

> The autonomy of moral behaviour is final and irreducible. It escapes all codification, as it does not serve any purpose outside of itself and does not enter a relationship with anything outside itself; that is, no relationship that could be monitored, standardized, codified. (1991:213)

Bauman also places this ethical relation as prior to – both underlying and subverting – more macro-societal structures: 'Societal processes start when the structure of morality (tantamount to intersubjectivity) is already there. *Morality is not a product of society*' (1991:183 emphasis original). This may be compared with Derrida's view of the movement

of deconstruction being inherently at work in any structural formulation, especially when taken alongside Derrida's claim that there is a similar ethic lying at the heart of deconstruction. Accordingly, Bauman is similarly clear that such an understanding of morality places ethics as militating against the formation of organisations:

> From the organization's point of view, morally inspired conduct is utterly useless, nay subversive … social organisation consists therefore in neutralizing the disruptive and deregulating impact … [of] moral behaviour. (1991:214)

Given Bauman's earlier interest in a Levinasian understanding of ethics, it seems reasonable to suggest that a negotiation with such a concept of ethics may be involved in the 'communities "lite"' or 'liquid religions' posited by Groot and linked with Liberal Quakerism by Collins and Dandelion (2014). If such concepts are emerging within the Liberal Quaker group, as this thesis seeks to demonstrate they are, then it may be said that elements of the group are moving towards a position where they are grappling with the tension between the aspiration to an ethic of openness towards otherness and Liberal Quakerism's manifestation as a social organisation – and, more than this, that such an aspiration is beginning to be internally seen as potentially constitutive of Quaker religiosity. To use Derrida and Caputo's terminology, the thesis' engagement with and assessment of alteristic responses can be framed as a question about the extent to which developments and/or liquidity in Liberal Quakerism are becoming internally understood as an attempt at institutionalising the 'impossible'.

Here, parallels may be made between Zachhuber's framing of mystic-type religion as a social anti-type and the understanding of an alteristic ethic as also antithetical to social

organisation (2016:73).[47] Such emerging views may suggest a shift from an individualistic emphasis on personal experiences with the divine towards an emphasis on responsibility towards the other as underlying and informing the ultimately incodifiable/ineffable Quaker religious experience, with the potential for a synthesis to be attempted via the universalisation of the experience of faith akin to the moves made by Derrida in the later development of his thought.

Jeremy Carrette, however, raises a note of caution around making such an equivalence between the relational experience, of openly engaging with others, and the form religiosity seen in negative theology which concerns. He notes that, whilst there may be apparent parallels, a concern for clearing 'human thought of secondary constructions in order to reveal the primacy of discursive practice' is not equivalent to the primary endeavour of negative theology, ' … to move beyond all thought and discourse to ascend to the primacy of God', though the two are frequently confused (Carrette, 2000:85). However, in line with the earlier quote from Pattison, one may argue that employing such thinkers in an engagement with mysticism or negative theology does not entail advocating that their endeavours began as equivalent; rather that the thinking of, for example, Derrida may advance a welcome shift in mystical/negative theological thought. Furthermore, ultimately the interests and argument of this thesis are not concerned with whether or not it is correct to understand negative theologians and deconstructionists (and/or Bakhtinians) to be engaged in a similar endeavour, but with exploring whether, in their internal reflections and discussions, some Liberal Quakers are developing analogous alteristic responses in the light of their diverse (a)theological culture. Questions over the sophistication or astuteness of

[47] See §1.4.1.2.

equivalencies drawn between a transcendent 'primacy of God' and an ethical phenomenology informed by relations and responsibilities towards non-divine others, with regard to the underpinnings of negative theology as an academic school of thought, are beside the point: the point is to demonstrate, via the comparative use of Bakhtin, Derrida and Bauman etc., that such a development of thought is somewhat anticipatable in the context of a diverse and shifting cultural and/or discursive landscape such as that of Liberal Quakerism.

The thesis demonstrates that these types of views can indeed be seen as emerging within the Liberal Quaker group via an engagement with some relevant academic work done on the nascent and ethical culture of Liberal Quakers (Best, 2008, 2010; Meads, 2008, 2011; Scully, 2008); some relevant theological and philosophical work suggesting ways in which Quakers may respond to the challenges of pluralism, individualism and/or relativism in liberal and/or postmodern contexts (Nakano, 2011; Rediehs, 2016, 2015); and some internal popular commentators more pointedly responding to the issue of theism–nontheism, particularly within the British context (Gillman, 2012, 2014, 2018; Rock, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c; Rowlands, 2017)

A final note relating to the possible manifestation of such responses[48] is that concepts of an ethical unconditional commitment towards the other as seen in Levinas, Derrida and Bauman have previously been expressed as and/or related to radical forms of nonviolence (Levinas, 1991 [1969]:203), and a 'ethics of care' in turn associated with feminist ethics (Critchley, 2014; Honneth, 1995; Scully, 2008). These lines of thought lend themselves to

[48] Explored further in Chapter 5.

being synergised with historical values of the Religious Society of Friends – a commitment to nonviolence and a gender-inclusive stance (Dandelion, 2007:36-37). These historical qualities may be seen to both expand the potential appeal of such alteristic responses for Liberal Quakers, and also to blur the boundaries between these alteristic responses, with their greater potential to engage with experiential concerns, and the reflexive-structural responses which emphasise the role of common historical and/or cultural-linguistic structures and resources in maintaining group identity.

(2.6) Summary/Conclusion

This chapter has considered ways in which previous scholarship within the field of Quaker Studies has suggested that the pluralistic and permissive nature of Liberal Quaker theological culture and/or discursive landscape may be moving beyond the accommodating universalist-type assumptions discussed in Chapter 1. It went on to further explore Dandelion's formulations around the 'behavioural creed' and/or orthopraxy lending Quakers a possible basis for coherence and an attitude of 'absolute perhaps' as a basis for understanding how Quaker belief normatively operates.

The chapter considered the dynamics of development of Liberal Quakerism in conversation with academic formulations around late modernity (variously labelled as 'postmodernity', 'hypermodernity', 'radical modernity' and/or 'reflexive modernity', etc.), primarily with reference to Giddens' conceptualisation of the dynamic of reflexivity in hypermodernity (1991) and the related work of Collins (2002a, 2002b, 2002c, 2004, 2008). The chapter looked to give a thickened (Geertz, 2017) framework for understanding the group's shifting

and diversifying development. Accordingly, the chapter has given some consideration to how such a reflexive dynamic may feed into a re-opening of Quaker discourses concerning a common Quaker theology and/or identity – leading to potential resources for the construction of candidate neo-orthodoxies. Such a re-opening would stand somewhat in opposition to Dandelion's concepts that Quakers maintain their group coherence primarily by reference to the culture of silence and orthopraxy rather than any more discursive and/or linguistic formulations.

To give an indicative framework for understanding the emerging views, there has been further exploration of what the thesis refers to as reflexive-structural responses and alteristic responses. Connections were made between these potential lines of response and the work of Collins and Grant, alongside developments of thought seen in the work of postmodernist thinkers/theologians and discourse theorists (Bakhtin, Lindbeck, Derrida and Bauman). These responses may therefore be positioned as somewhat foreseeable responses to the types of late modern societal dynamics delineated earlier in the chapter.

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Chapter 3
The Emergence of Quaker Nontheism: Disturbing The Universalist Accommodation

(3.0) Introduction

This chapter of the thesis focuses on a more detailed exploration of the emergence and character of Quaker nontheism. It begins by re-establishing that nontheistic, agnostic and/or atheist type beliefs are no longer quasi-concealed/marginal beliefs held by some Liberal Quakers on an individual level, but are being visibly expressed and debated on the popular level. It explores the different forms of this expression of nontheism, noting that the beliefs that fall under the label of 'nontheism' themselves take diverse forms. However, special attention is paid to the form of nontheism promoted by David Boulton and underpinned by the philosophy of Don Cupitt, as it is the form most prominently expressed in the popular literature and thereby, contentiously, one of the most impactful on the debate.

The chapter notes that, significantly, Cupitt's theology may be considered as epistemologically postmodernist. Its adoption by certain 'religious' individuals and/or Liberal Quakers may also represent an emic reflexive employment of academic formulations concerning communally constructed structures (be these understood as cultural-linguistic, or idiomatic, or in terms of genres, games or habitus etc.). In line with the discussion in §2.5 above, this chapter shows how similarities can be drawn between Cupitt's theology and those theologies the thesis has brought into its demarcation of reflexive-structural

responses – principally, the theology of Lindbeck. This aligns with the notion that such a dynamic of reflexivity can act both to motivate a shifting and diversifying mode of group development, instigating points of tension, and to inform new routes to understanding and formulating a common understanding of group identity and, potentially, 'theology/orthodoxy'. The chapter notes, however, that there is disagreement between Cupitt and Lindbeck concerning the extent to which these cultural-linguistic modes can be and/or should be stably maintained. This anticipates work in the following chapter, which examines the degree to which Quakers have internally developed and/or presented reflexive-structural responses as a potential basis for demarcating authentic Liberal Quakerism and/or cohering the group. The disagreement between Cupitt and Lindbeck is worth considering, as it structurally mimics (credibly informed in part by the influence of Cupitt) tensions between Quakers on the acceptability of the reflexive-structural responses.

This chapter argues that the increased visibility of nontheism, and the manner in which Quakers have engaged with the theism–nontheism issue, represents an intensification of Quakers' confronting and becoming internally aware of the types of dynamics outlined in earlier chapters. Crucially, this chapter demonstrates that aspects of Quaker nontheism (Boulton–Cupitt) are not compatible with the formerly accommodating universalist-type-assumptions. This chapter further contends that the broader approach of the Liberal Quaker group to the issue of nontheism indicates they are unlikely to disbar those Boulton–Cupitt nontheists who cannot be accommodated under universalist-type assumptions, but rather are directly engaging with them. Significantly, the chapter demonstrates a growing commitment amongst Quakers to respect difference by not employing the conflict-resolution tactic of claiming they are speaking to common experiences using different words

(Plüss, 2007:261,265). This adds credence to the notion that the universalist accommodation is explicitly breaking down, opening the way for alternative formulations of common Quaker identity and/or candidate neo-orthodoxies.

In considering the potential for lines of reconciliation between Boulton–Cupitt nontheists and theistic Quakers, the chapter also considers Dandelion's concept of 'absolute perhaps'. The chapter demonstrates that the 'absolute perhaps', in an extended form – that is to say, one that incorporates an openness to (a)theological views that go beyond openness to the expression of a universal religious experience – is a useful conceptual tool for understanding the debate's dynamics. It captures well the temperament of Liberal Quakers when negotiating issues of (a)theological belief, with Boulton–Cupitt nontheists positioning their legitimacy within the group as based on their own willingness to operate and be incorporated within an expansive tolerance of 'absolute perhaps'. However, the chapter also suggests that if an attitude of 'absolute perhaps' is taken up as a potential point of accommodation, the details of how it is transmuted into candidate neo-orthodoxy by Liberal Quakers are likely to be multifarious and to require examination and thickening. This line of exploration informs the work of the following two chapters.

(3.1) Quaker Nontheism

The label 'Quaker nontheists' has come to be the predominant term for the collective of Liberal Quakers now self-identifying as having no active belief in God, or of there being any theistic content to the Quaker religious experience, but still maintaining that they are authentically Quakers. The group, as they themselves stress, is internally diverse, thereby

mimicking the broader diversity of Liberal Quakerism on a sub-group level. In his introduction to *Godless for God's Sake* (2006), a collection of 27 essays from Quakers broadly identifying as 'nontheist' and one of the most explicit collective self-declarations from Quaker nontheists to date, David Boulton asserts that: 'There is no one answer, no unified or official 'nontheist Quaker view' – any more than there is one official theist Quaker view' (2006:5). One of the manifestations of this diversity can be seen in the fact that individual 'nontheists' differ in the label they prefer to assign to themselves. Consequently, they have in the past deliberated on the best label by which to refer to themselves as a group. This is significant, as the question of whether the label of nontheist is correct or appropriate to the views being espoused within the 'nontheist' group is a key question asked by Liberal Quakers more broadly in response to, and with a view to resolving, the apparent theist–nontheist divide.[49] However, the purpose of discussing nontheists' process of self-labelling here is to give a preliminary impression of what Quaker nontheism incorporates and entails.

In *Godless for God's Sake* (2006), Boulton laments that '[l]abels are nearly always problematic', before diving into an account of the discussion the contributors had over what term would 'best describe' Quakers who do not hold beliefs in a God, a deity or the divine, as a group (2006:6). He reports that there were those ' … happy to be labelled "atheists"' and those for whom that term has too negative connotations of 'militant opposition to all forms of religious expression and practice' (ibid.). Some preferred to identify as agnostic while others wanted to reclaim the term 'humanist … from the anti-religious connotations it

[49] Further discussed in §3.4.

came to acquire in the late twentieth century' (2006:7). The term 'nontheism' is taken to refer to:

> The absence of any belief in a deity or deities, in the existence of God (where 'existence' is understood in a realist, objective sense), and especially belief in one God as creator and supreme ruler. (2006:6)

Boulton contrasts nontheism thus defined with 'atheism', which he takes to connote an active disbelief in God and/or opposition to religious organisations and practices in general (ibid.). Owing in part to these more neutral associations, nontheism has manifested as the least disputed term amongst Quakers claiming not to have an active belief in God (it has advantages such as incorporating views like agnosticism); as such it is the label most commonly used to refer to these individuals collectively (2006:7), and so it is the one predominantly employed in this thesis.

To give some historical context, Boulton has given his own account of the group's development in an article for *Quaker Religious Thought* entitled 'Nontheism Among Friends: Its Emergence and Meaning' (2012). He claims the term was probably first used in a Liberal Quaker context at a workshop in the USA (Ithaca, NY) in 1976, from which survives the 'Report of the Workshop for Non-Theistic Friends' (2012:35). In his own account Boulton quotes somewhat selectively from the report and references the reporters' affirmation that:

> There are non-theistic Friends. There are Friends who might be called agnostics, atheists, skeptics, but who would, nevertheless describe themselves as reverent seekers … We believe Quakerism can accommodate this minority, and find part of its vital creativity in the process. ('Report From Nontheistic Friends' Workshop,' 2005; also in Boulton 2012:35-36)

However, questions may be raised concerning the nature and extent of the Quaker nontheism represented at this workshop. The workshop was attended by 15–20 individuals, who again themselves emphasised that they held a diversity of worldviews (Boulton, 2012:35). Some in fact identified as theist, and by the reporter's own account most of them held a view of something universal and/or transcendent (in that it was 'beyond' their 'biological selves'):

> We found in our group that we were representative of a rainbow of beliefs which exists within the larger Society of Friends. This spectrum included theists who define God as a spirit or presence which intervenes and guides in a personal way. Most were non-theists who, while believing in something universal beyond our biological selves which exists in everyone, do not believe in an external directing spirit. There were seekers and questioners looking for new definitions of God free of human characteristics or not wanting to use the term God at all. Some of us explored life-energy as an evolutionary process existing in all of us and giving meaning to life. Some of us identified ourselves simply as 'non-believers'. ('Report From Nontheistic Friends' Workshop,' 2005)

Given that many of the individuals present did believe they were seeking something (universal and/or transcendent), it may be asked whether most of them might be well categorised and contented within a Quaker universalist framework. This may lead to questions concerning the actual extent of the divide between Quaker theists and nontheists, and whether the labelling of some Quakers as nontheists is causing a greater division than exists in terms of the actual worldviews of the individuals in either camp.

Boulton goes on to say that in America the 'Nontheist Workshop' was not repeated again until 1996, but from that point onwards a workshop has been held every year except one; he then turns to focus on the growth of Quaker nontheism in Britain (2012:4). Concerning

nontheism within British Liberal Quakerism, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Dandelion noted while he was doing his research in the early 1990s that there was a small number of individuals within the group who identifed as either agnostic or atheists; however, he suggests that at that point the Quakers adopting such labels were more protesting against particular views of God than denying that there was any divine element to the Quaker religious experience (1996:158). Boulton himself closely connects the emergence of Quaker nontheism in Britain with the work of the theologian Don Cupitt in his books *Taking Leave of God* (2001 [1979]) and *The Sea of Faith* (1985 [1984]) and the TV series (of the same title) preceding the latter, along with the subsequently formed Sea of Faith Network (SoFN), established around 1987/88 in response to the dissemination of Cupitt's theological views and with an expressed affinity towards them (Boulton, 2012:4; Davies and Northam-Jones, 2012:227).

(3.2) Don Cupitt

Cupitt, based on his reading of Ludwig Wittgenstein, argues for a view of religion and God as linguistically and 'humanly constructed' – a view derived from his endorsement of what he took to be Wittgenstein's view that all reality as experienced by humans is informed by 'man-made' and/or cultural-linguistic-type structures (1985:20):

> Language comes first, for it prescribes the shape of the various 'realities' amongst which we move, and not the other way round. Reality does not determine language: language determines reality. (Cupitt, 1985:220)

In his *Mysticism After Modernity* (1998), Cupitt also goes on to explicitly apply this type of dynamic to mystical and/or religious experiences, pointedly advocating a 'mysticism of secondariness' whereby the content of said experiences are placed as secondary to the constructive influence of language and writing (1998:2-3).[50] This essentially amounts to an inversion of the typical accommodating universalist assumptions operated by Quakers around religious experience and its linguistic/external expression (Cupitt, 1998:2-3; Grant, 2014:37-42). Rather than the internal/personal religious experience being placed as primary, universal and ineffable (Grant, 2014:37-38), the experience is seen as secondary, particular to, informed by and embedded within surrounding contexts and cultural-linguistic structures.

In 1984 Cupitt referred to his thought as 'non-realist' (1985:54-55). However, he has since noted its correspondence to styles of thought termed as postmodern and has started to utilise the term (1998:2-3; 'Don Cupitt – Official Website,' n.d.). Cupitt's thought falls in line with Lyotard's formulation of the postmodern condition which places notions of truth, knowledge and belief as being legitimised with reference to internally coherent linguistic/language-game-type structures rather than with reference to any particular metaphysics. The concept that experience is constructed by external, cultural-linguistic-type structures rather than being constituted primarily as an internal experience of the individual subject has also been identified as a common 'postmodern' thesis (Benhabib, 2011).

[50] In *Mysticism After Modernity* Cupitt indeed argues that mystical writing has historically been about subverting hegemonic and/or normative structures, and directly compares it to Derridean 'deconstruction' (1998:103-104). He frames this as a celebratory approach to 'nihilism' (1998:131). He is insensitive to the potential ethical import of developments in Derrida's later thought which, this thesis argues, are somewhat analogous to views emerging within Liberal Quakerism.

Now, as mentioned in the previous chapter, there is an often an expressed view that societal traits typically associated with postmodernity (plurality and permissiveness) militate against the formation and maintenance of lasting, cohesive religious groups (Plüss, 2007:254). The related but separate phenomena of individuals' developing and/or adopting an epistemologically/philosophically postmodernist view, such as Cupitt's, would seem to push further away from the holding of a religious viewpoint. Ostensibly the perspective flies in the face of religion's supposed *raison d'être*: it seemingly denies that religion can make credible claims to mystical/transcendental/metaphysical truths. It denies that there are phenomena in the human experience that are discernibly beyond a cultural-linguistic influence and framing. These challenges are exemplified by Ernest Gellner in his view that core components of postmodernism are essentially relativism and subsequently nihilism (1992:2,50). Questions are thus raised concerning how Cupitt can position himself as advocating a religious position. Moreover, can other individuals adopt his views and maintain with intellectual integrity that they are still religious? In terms of the interests of this thesis, this relates to questions of how Liberal Quakers can draw upon and adopt Cupitt's thought, yet still argue and maintain that they are authentically Quaker.

Cupitt's response to this type of questioning is to criticise the assumption that viewing religious experiences as 'man-made' and structurally informed would necessitate a rejection of religious beliefs of integrity. Arguing that this misses the full implications of the non-realist (or postmodern position), he states:

> Does this amount to saying that God is simply a humanly constructed ideal … This question is improper, because it is framed from an obsolete realist point of view. The suggestion that the idea of God is man-made would only seem startling if we could point by contrast to something that has *not* been made by men. But since our thought shapes all our objects, we cannot … God is man-made only in the non-startling sense that everything else is … But God is as real for us as anything else can be … (Cupitt, 1985:270-71)

He is making the point that once people internally take on a 'postmodern' perspective they are obviously no longer required to legitimise their beliefs with reference to metaphysically grounded or foundational truth claims, because they do not legitimise *any* of their views with reference to metaphysically grounded truth claims. People may argue that the core nature of religious belief is based around metaphysical/foundational truth claims and that if people give up on the credibility of foundational claims, they give up religious belief. Cupitt would retort that his point is not that there is definitively nothing (no truth) beyond cultural-linguistic structures, rather that people cannot have discernible knowledge of it. But perhaps more pertinent for a robust defence of his position, Cupitt advocates that: 'The meaning of 'God' [or transcendent experiences] is religious not metaphysical' (ibid.), and that the traditional linking of metaphysics with religious beliefs is not a static state of affairs; religion is not necessarily bound to that formulation. Rather, Cupitt views the definition of religion as broader and/or more adaptable; in a given context the legitimacy of religion should be judged from the same perspective (by the same criteria) as everything else; in line with Lyotard's pragmatic language-game formulation, in a postmodern context this would mean the uses religion provides as a language-game/idiom (1985:10).

The pragmatic benefits Cupitt outlines for engaging with religion when internally understood as a non-foundational cultural-linguistic structure are primarily therapeutic and

aesthetic. Essentially, he claims individuals should understand their engagement with religion as a process of self-actualisation. In other words, religion no longer becomes centred about the question of 'truth' but the question of 'living well':

> … the religious task has become the task of attaining true selfhood. The formation of a creative artist is the best image for this task … it often takes such a person … years of unremitting labour to find his mature style, his distinctive voice – and we have to do it not in art, but in life. (1985:266)

Cupitt has received many challenges to his thought from within the academy. There have been numerous challenges to his reading of Wittgenstein as a fully fledged linguistic idealist, often containing suggestions that Wittgenstein held a more mystical and apophatic view of religion and God (Fronda, 2010:177; Ward, 2005:326). Cupitt himself notes that Wittgenstein's 'ideas about religion were … conservative and nostalgic … with a kind of mystical inertia' (1985:227). However, Cupitt's use of the word 'inertia' here is telling, as he goes on to frame Wittgenstein's religious sentiments as holding him back from the implications of his philosophical work, saying:

> Had Wittgenstein been able to deliberately profane the sacred more thoroughly his final outlook might have been more satisfactory to him … his radical humanism remained tinged by a … note of religious frustration … He did not quite succeed in bringing about the full synthesis of faith and modernity. (1985:227-228)

It is highly questionable whether Wittgenstein shared Cupitt's goal of such a synthesis.

Related to this point, Graham Ward questions Cupitt's self-categorisation as 'postmodern' (2005:329). Ward notes that there is a plurality of postmodernisms from a variety of postmodernist thinkers, including theologians (2005:322-3). He divides those that often go

under the label of 'postmodern theology' into two camps: liberal postmodern theologies and conservative postmodern theologies (2005:325-327). This move risks over-simplification but has some conceptual utility. Ward groups Cupitt in the Liberal camp of postmodern theologians, who (he contends) are not really postmodern at all, but rather are extending the project and assumptions of liberal modern thought (2005:327). Significantly for Cupitt's case, Ward identities one of the key groundings of the liberal modern project as the 'exponential pursuit of human emancipation' (ibid.), with which Cupitt somewhat falls in line in his promotion of people's engaging in religion for purposes of individual self-actualisation. Ward contrasts this with conservative postmodern theologies, which he contends 'are more accurately entitled postmodern' (2005:329). According to him the latter do not aim towards any final goal, such as a liberal aspiration for individualised freedom and/or flourishing, thereby betraying a hidden meta-narrative/metaphysics or foundations.

Ward mentions the postliberal thinking of George Lindbeck at the beginning of his description of the 'conservative postmodern theologies' (2005:329-30), though it is unclear whether he considers Lindbeck as authentically postmodern or not. This is significant, as there are a number of parallels between Cupitt and Lindbeck's theological thought. Like Cupitt, Lindbeck is influenced by a reading of Wittgenstein which leads him to his concept of the phenomenological/subjective lives of religious individuals being informed by linguistic-type structures (2009:18-19). Lindbeck justifies the legitimacy of these cultural-linguistic structures along similar pragmatic lines. Drawing an analogy between religions and maps, Lindbeck claims that a religion or religious idiom should be considered legitimate when it 'guides the traveller rightly' (2009:38); i.e. religious idioms should be considered legitimate on the basis of how well the rules they delineate help a person comprehend, engage and

live in the world. This seemingly aligns him with Cupitt in seeing religion's major function as helping individuals to self-actualise.

In line with the previous chapter's discussion of Lindbeck as reflexively employing academic formulations from, e.g., sociology and anthropology (Berger and Geertz),[51] the similarities to Cupitt's theology entail that the latter can also be understood as advocating the possibility of individuals internally/emically recognising and reflexively applying 'these academic schemes'. In their work on the Sea of Faith Network (SoFN), Davies and Northam-Jones (2012) note that such:

> … groups appearing to offer explicit application of … academic schemes provide an interesting testing ground for the shape of 'the secret religion of the educated classes' in an apparently secularizing society (2012:228)

This agrees with the earlier chapter's contention that recent developments in Quakerism offer a route to understanding alternative forms of new religiosity. These depart from Campbell's (1978) discussion of the matter, focusing primarily on Troeltsch's mystic-type religion as 'the secret religion of the educated classes'. One of the ways in which Davies and Northam-Jones characterise Cupitt's theology as operating among the SoFN is as 'Berger without "objectivation"' (2012:241):

> … of the many ways these developments might be explored, one lies in Berger's … typology of religious meaning-making through the externalization, 'objectivation' and internalization of ideas … Crucially, however, the critical reflexivity adopted by the Sea of Faith denies the legitimacy of, and the need for, the second process of objectivation with its non-realism removing 'objectivation' from Berger's scheme and allowing artistic creativity in the now explicit processes of externalization and internalization to flourish, in the sense of being produced in artistic materials or

[51] See §2.4.

> actions. The social purpose of religious knowledge can be affirmed as such and efforts to disguise it are explicitly identified as mistaken or disingenuous. Religious tradition itself is thus acknowledged as a creative human process. Far from regulating individuals' engagement with themselves and the world, the religious knowledge of their inherited traditions is used to foster innovative ways of knowing and being. (Davies and Northam-Jones, 2012:242)

This fits in with both this thesis' discussions concerning Quakers adopting reflexive-structural positions whereby Quakers understand the coherence as based on common semiotic structures (be they behavioural, narrative, historical or cultural-linguistic etc.) separate from the actual 'objectivation' of the truth value of belief claims. However, if this step of 'objectivation' is skipped, there is a question over the extent to which the externalised structures can remain stable and communally agreed upon – thus maintaining function as a basis for cohering the group seemingly on the pragmatic grounds that they function to cohere the group.

This relates to a key difference between Cupitt and Lindbeck. Cupitt puts more emphasis on this self-actualisation/creativity of the individual. He also considers it unproblematic/permissible for the individuals to break down or shift away from the initial cultural hegemony of the structures which lend them the resources for the project of attaining selfhood (1998:115,1985:266). Lindbeck, on the other hand, holds that, to sustain legitimacy (i.e. efficacy in pragmatically shaping the subjectivities of individuals), religions must maintain an authoritative/communal interpretation of their doctrines/cultural-linguistic idiom (2009:18). This divide gives plausibility to the classification of Cupitt as 'liberal' and Lindbeck as 'conservative' (Ward, 2005:327-329). However, it is still an open question whether either or both of the aforementioned authors should be considered as

authentically postmodern. Stuart Kendall contends that Lindbeck's non-foundational conservative stance places him back in a premodern context where claims are justified with reference to tradition (Kendall, 1995:107). As to Cupitt, questions over whether he offers a legitimate reading of Wittgenstein, or what constitutes an authentic postmodernist position, are not ultimately a major concern of this thesis, which is concerned with Cupitt primarily in relation to the impact he has had on nontheist Quakers and the subsequent Liberal Quaker discussions on the theism–nontheism issue. Consideration of the disagreement between Cupitt and Lindbeck is pertinent, however, as it structurally mimics (credibly informed in part by the influence of Cupitt) tensions between Quakers on the acceptability of the reflexive-structural responses, as explored further in the next chapter.

An additional question may be raised over the degree to which an internal (emic) recognition that a religious group has a certain idiom or cultural-linguistic structure commits one to the personal view that religion is entirely humanly constructed. Similar to Dandelion's contention that Quaker coherence may be based on orthopraxy rather than personal beliefs, other reflexive-structural-type responses (containing more discursive/idomatic elements) may be linked to a contention that there is an extended notion of practice (involving idiomatic/cultural/historical elements) which informs the Quaker identity, whilst leaving the question of personal (e.g. theistic/nontheistic) beliefs relatively open. This may be tied to a key concern of this chapter (and of the thesis at large), namely, that if Cupitt-type theological views are present amongst Liberal Quakers in the form of some Quaker nontheists, to what extent can they exist alongside the universalist-type views Quakers have typically operated in order to understand their coherence? How do

Quakers negotiate and/or understand themselves as a coherent group if these seemingly incompatible views are both present?

(3.2.1) Influence on Quaker Nontheists and the Sea of Faith Network

First it is important to consider the extent of Cupitt's influence on the Quaker nontheists more directly. Boulton himself, the most visible proponent of nontheism among Quakers, is inspired by and follows much of Cupitt's thinking. In his book *The Trouble with God* (2005 [2002]) Boulton relates that: ' … "God" once meant something clear and definite … Cupitt was forcing me to rethink … Language didn't work as I had somewhat naively supposed … ' (2005:65). In a review of Cupitt's book *Mysticism After Modernity* (1998) Boulton gives an even clearer endorsement of the placement of experience as being constructed by cultural-linguistic structures:

> … the notion of non-linguistic experience or non-verbal thought has been so comprehensively demolished in the last thirty years that we can only revisit the territory by climbing on board H.G. Wells's time machine and engaging reverse gear.
> …
> The notion that there are or can be, either in mystical rapture or after death, extra-linguistic psychological states or experiences that verify beliefs about God will not bear scrutiny. To think it, we'd have to 'put it into words', which would drag it down into language... We cannot think ourselves clear of language. Only language can turn an event into an experience of something. (Boulton, 1998)

He reaffirms this view in several other places, saying in another publication: 'Radical religious humanism is wholly secular in the root meaning of the word: it is of this world, the only world we can know and the only age of which we can have any direct experience' (2002:64). Similarly, in a pamphlet entitled 'The Faith of a Quaker Humanist', he asserts that:

> Humanists are rightly identified with the view that all religions, and therefore all gods, scriptures, mythologies … and institutions, are wholly human creations. The values they seek to promote are wholly human values. God is, at best, a mythological symbol of these values, a metaphor for them, a projection of them, an image-ined protagonist of the rich narratives human communities have created to express and interpret these values … he and the religions which give him shape … are man and woman-made, the products of human history, human culture and human language. There is no room in this scheme of things for 'revelation', in the traditional sense of a divine being allowing humanity, or chosen representatives of humanity, occasional glimpses of himself and his wisdom. (1997:10-11)

In the pamphlet Boulton then goes on to credit 'Don Cupitt' as giving a 'contemporary post-modern expression' to this type of view (ibid.). Therefore, considering Boulton's own use and praise of Cupitt's theological views it would be fair to say the form of Quaker nontheism Boulton promotes would fall in line with Cupitt's non-realist theological views.

Given that they assert that they are a (a)theologically pluralistic group, one might ask how many Quaker nontheists share Boulton's affinity for Cupitt's theology. It might be posited that the importance of Cupitt's style of thinking within the Religious Society of Friends is exacerbated by Boulton's prominence as an exponent of Quaker nontheism (Grant, 2014:168). However, there is evidence that this affinity extends beyond Boulton. There are articles by other Quaker writers which express similar views; Boulton and Cupitt have both pointed to the Quaker universalist pamphlet by Jean Hardy entitled 'There is another world but it is this one' (Boulton 2002:64; Cupitt, n.d.; Hardy, 1988)). Additionally, Cupitt (n.d.) reported that at a Quaker Universalist Group conference he attended in 1997: 'at least a fifth of those present' were also members of the SoFN. Meanwhile, Boulton identifies Quakers as 'the largest group in the Network after Anglicans' (2012:4). As already mentioned, the SoFN is a group specifically motivated by Cupitt's theology. The group's stated aim is that of: 'exploring and affirming religious faith as a human creation' ('Sea of

Faith Network | Home Page,' n.d.). This view of God and religion appears to to be borne out concerning the individual views of those within the Network. The 2007–2008 email survey of UK-based SoFN members (with 55 respondents) found that 94% expressed ' … agreement on the centrality of God being a "human-social construct"' (Davies and Northam-Jones, 2012:231). From this it would seem that a number of Quakers (i.e. those belonging to both the SoFN and the Religious Society of Friends) do hold views in line with the Boulton–Cupitt style of nontheism.

However, here Davies and Northam-Jones air a note of caution: 'The precise degree to which Cupitt's non-realist theology may accurately reflect what each individual thinks is open to question and responses to the survey showed some variation between members' (2012:238). They note that, while a majority of respondents agreed that they viewed God and religion as human-social constructs, a majority were also 'strongly committed to exploring non-church-based alternative and eclectic spiritualities' (2012:232). They make an observation that members will often express a 'pragmatic acceptance of the "unknowability of the mysteries of the universe"' (2012:232), quoting one respondent as saying: ' … the mystery of the creation of the universe is unknowable to us. We are like goldfish in a bowl – we can't get outside the bowl to see how it was made.' (in ibid.)

This idea that there may be something mysterious (behind, e.g., the creation of the universe), which is inaccessible to humans, could be taken as compatible with Cupitt's theology. The metaphor of being trapped inside a goldfish bowl accords with Cupitt's notion of human experience being 'trapped' within social-linguistic structures (1985:220). However, in line with his declaration that '[t]he meaning of "God" is religious not

metaphysical' (1985:270-71), Cupitt would hold that the question of such *unknowable* mysteries is not the major concern of theology or the enterprise of religion. According to Cupitt, the entire practice of religion necessarily involves individuals' being impacted upon by cultural-linguistic structures and using cultural-linguistic resources to attain selfhood. The concept of an 'unknowability mystery' can only play an operative role in so far as it is a concept within human social-linguistic structures. If this mystery is framed as having an ontological content, with a direct operative role/place in informing religious experiences, apart from and/or prior to these, then this would deviate from Cupitt's view; and indeed those in the Network who hold views involving operative unknowable mysteries align better with the mystical-universalist Quaker view.

The members of the SoFN who are open to ideas of religion's being a completely 'human creation', or the possibility that there could be some mystical input, could be seen as taking a similar attitude to the 'absolute perhaps' (Dandelion, 2008a:33-36, 2004). However, this is somewhat confused as it is unclear what the limits of the 'absolute perhaps' are, how absolute it actually is. If the uncertainty of the 'absolute perhaps' is primarily an uncertainty around the nature and correct expression of a universal religious experience, then the 'absolute perhaps' would seem to accord with the accommodating universalist assumptions discussed in Chapter 1. This would seem to separate those open to a Cupitt-type view of religion from the scope of the spiritual enterprise within Liberal Quakerism. If the 'absolute perhaps' is taken to extend to Cupitt-type/nontheistic/(a)theological views, then there is a question of how this manifests. Does it amount to a broad tolerance, even of views that are seemingly incompatible or not 'perhapsy' with regard to each other? Alternatively, does it entail the 'absolute perhaps' extending as far as having to operate on a personal

epistemological uncertainty over whether or not religious experience is primary or secondary to man-made cultural-linguistic structures?

The latter formulation presents some problems as Liberal Quakers still express theological preferences and differences. Indeed, as a result of discussions on the theism–nontheism issue, there are indications of Quakers moving to explicitly affirm their theological difference.[52] This is in contrast to the former typical tactic of conflict resolution along the universalist-type lines of claiming the issue was one of different forms of giving linguistic expression to a common experience (Plüss 2007:261,265). One possible framing is that 'absolute perhaps' 'implicitly recognises difference but contains its expression' (P. Dandelion, personal communication in a supervision discussion) so as to not be too didactic. This resonates closely with Grant's (2014) work concerning there being grammatical-type rules governing Liberal Quaker expressions of belief; however, if the governing rule is a lack of didacticism, then this marks a shift away from there being an implicit quasi-orthodox assumption of a universal religious experience. Moreover, it may raise questions over whether this is substantive enough to demarcate expressions which are distinctly Quaker, along with whether this is a thick enough reflection of how such an attitude might de facto manifest in the Quaker group.

Turning back to the SoFN, Davies and Northam-Jones identify its members as viewing the network as a '"Safe" Space' to discuss their views of religion (2012:238). This would seem to fit with the 'absolute perhaps' understood as a broad tolerance. However, looking at the evidence they present from respondents, an interpretation could be given that there are at

[52] Discussed further in §3.5.

least two different senses in which members view the Network as a 'safe space'. On the one hand, they may see it as a 'Safe Space' in the sense that it offers a space where other people hold in common with them a non-realist type view of religion, thereby allowing them to express their such views which may not be accepted in other congregations:

> It is reassuring for me to know that others within the church as well as outside it see their faith as essentially a human creation, but still worth pursuing.
> …
> [SoF membership] made me see I am not alone; there are many who have made similar journeys. (2012:238-39)

On the other hand, Davies and Northam-Jones also quote from respondents suggesting the Network acts as a 'safe space' in the sense that it allows free expression and/or discussion of a broader range of religious concepts and/or frameworks beyond Cupitt's (peculiar) non-realist views:

> [The SoF] provides a loving supportive community in which people feel free to explore whatever 'God' means to them without being bound by any literal interpretations.
>
> [The SoF has enabled me to] discuss ideas without feeling I need explain myself or feeling that I may be undermining what others feel is important.
> (ibid.)

This second notion upholds an 'absolute perhaps' understood as a broad tolerance. It may be said that if dual members of The Religious Society of Friends and the SoFN are open to the expression of more mystical/universalist views, even if they do not hold those views themselves, then they may be incorporated into Liberal Quakerism along the lines of 'absolute perhaps' understood as a broad tolerance. However, again this would mark a shift away from the accommodation of Quaker theological diversity by reference to universalist-

type assumptions, along with raising the question of how it would manifest if explicitly recognised as the accommodating principle of Quaker diversity.

Following their consideration of the SoFN as a 'safe space', Davies and Northam-Jones introduce into their analysis the concept of Network members' employing 'bricolage in multiple interpretative systems'[53] whereby they build up an understanding of the world and a composite 'religious' identity by drawing a variety of source traditions (2012:239):

> A number of informal comments at the Conference indicated that the SoF was perceived as becoming increasingly concerned with stimulating the spiritual journeys of its members rather than seeking to advance the cause of a de-supernaturalized model of religious faith with which members are, by definition, strongly familiar. In this sense, the role of the Network has shifted from championing the decline of the inherited modes of Christian belief towards encouraging the Network's members to surf freely on the newly found sea of religious liberation, in which experimentation and the use of a variety of source traditions are not only permitted, but encouraged. (2012:340)

Again, parallels may be drawn between this bricolage or mix-and-match method of constructing religious meaning and Dandelion's concept of the 'absolute perhaps'. Even closer correlation may be seen with Jackie Leach Scully's notion that Quakers employ a 'collage approach' to developing their systems of morality/ethical worldviews (2008:107-

[53] 'Bricolage' is originally a French term with no direct English translation, approximately meaning to engage in 'do-it-yourself' activities of repair or fabrication, it may be related to 'fiddling' or 'tinkering' (Altglas, 2014:274). Véronique Altglas (2014) has argued that there are various ways it has been applied to the understanding of discursive and/or cultural dynamics. She contends that the concept of bricolage which has taken prominence in the sociological study of religion and culture is one that fits with the 'fragmented' and 'deregulated' formulation of society in 'postmodernity':
'Sociologists of culture and religion have started to understand "bricolage" as embodying the traits of a social world which has broken free from tradition and historicity … [leaving] emancipated individuals choosing, consuming and combining cultural and religious resources of all kinds in unique assortments, thereby elaborating personal identities and lifestyles according to their subjectivity …. ' (2014:480)

122).[54] However, as Davies and Northam-Jones indicate, this process of bricolage seemingly takes place as underpinned and/or bracketed by the 'de-supernaturalized model of religious faith with which members are, by definition, strongly familiar'. This 'use of a variety of source traditions' would seemingly only fit with a broad tolerance notion of the 'absolute perhaps' if notions of a universal mystical experience were also accepted and discussed as a possibility. Whilst some members may pragmatically accept that there may be some unknowable aspects to the universe, it seems fair to say the matter of religion is largely seen as de-supernaturalised within the SoFN.

Boulton, however, does explicitly note that some members within the SoFN are open to notions of religious faith beyond its being humanly/socially constructed, suggesting that some may even be open to 'extra-terrestrial input', i.e. a transcendent/mystical element. He goes on to engage with the very question of how open the SoFN should be in its exploration of religious meaning and/or religious identity, saying that:

> … by no means all Sea of Faith members share the enthusiasm which some of us have for 'religious humanism' as a description of the Network's ideology. The main reason for this is resistance to the idea that the Network has anything resembling an ideology: some members take the commitment to 'religious faith as a human creation' as loosely and poetically as they take the creeds, liturgies and other forms of God-talk: It's just a picturesque form of words, they seem to suggest, not to be taken literally or seriously. For them, the Network is not primarily an organisation promoting the understanding that religion and its gods are wholly human creations, but an open forum for exploration of religious ideas in general and doctrinal doubts in particular, un-anchored by any commitment to anything. This is a potential fault-line which may one day open up and swallow us whole: the Network as open forum full stop, or the Network as open forum promoting a particular view of religion – the view that … religion is a human creation. My own view is simple. If we go down the open-forum-full-stop road and back away from our commitment to promote the understanding that religious faith is a wholly human creation without even a sliver of

[54] Discussed in §5.1.1.

> extra-terrestrial input, we may end up with the need to invent a new network to explore and promote religious faith as a human creation! (Boulton, n.d.)

What Boulton describes as an 'open-forum-full-stop' can be seen to correlate with the notion of Dandelion's 'absolute perhaps' as a broad tolerance. However, as can be seen, in Boulton's view this is an inappropriate model for the SoFN, as he frames the group's defining purpose as exploring and promoting 'religious faith as a human creation'. It may be seen as somewhat ironic that Boulton believes the SoFN will lose its definitive character as a group while pushing for Liberal Quakerism to openly accept nontheistic views amongst its membership. Indeed, an internal criticism directed against Boulton (most notably by John Lampen) is that he has been over-zealous in the promotion of his form of nontheism (Boulton 2016:46; Boulton and Lampen, 2009). It may be said that Boulton may call for the Religious Society of Friends to operate an 'absolute perhaps' in the sense of an open-forum-full-stop or broad tolerance, but there are questions over whether he extends this tolerance himself. Additionally, he does not seem to operate a sense of 'perhapsness' concerning his own personal epistemological/theological position, or its expression. Boulton can be seen to have noted this criticism and may be moving to soften his initial position (2016:46). However, the point here is that Boulton's understanding of religion as initially framed is much in line with the non-realist theology of Don Cupitt and does not leave much space for the consideration of mystical elements.

Concerning how many Quakers follow beliefs similar to the line of Boulton–Cupitt, nontheism is ultimately difficult to discern. The internal views represented both amongst nontheist Quakers and within the SoFN, inspired by Cupitt's theology, are diverse and loosely defined. However, if Quakers make up a considerable component of the SoFN, which

largely holds a de-supernaturalised understanding of religion, it seems reasonable to assume that at least some Quakers have an affinity with the types of views Boulton espouses. Furthermore, even if the Boulton–Cupitt line of nontheism is over-represented in the literature as compared to the actual number of subscribers to it, Boulton is prominent as an exponent of it in the popular literature surrounding the theism–nontheism issue. Since the extracts used for *Quaker Faith and Practice* are commonly drawn from popular literature, the consequence is an increased potential of this line of nontheism to have notable impact on the consideration and construction of neo-orthodoxy within the group.

(3.3) Increasing Quaker Nontheist Visibility

Regarding the visibility of Quaker nontheism, the presence of some individuals in the group holding agnostic, atheistic and/or nontheistic views might not have become a controversial issue for the coherence of Liberal Quakerism had they remained minor, marginal and quasi-concealed, as they were when Dandelion observed them in the 1990s (1996). However, as previously indicated, nontheist views have moved to being more explicitly and prominently expressed within the Society. Boulton himself claims to 'have publicly advocated a Quaker humanism since the 1980s' (2006:1). However, it was during the 2000s one started to see the growth of a more visible 'organised nontheist presence within Liberal Quakerism' (Boulton, 2012:5). A website dedicated to Quaker nontheism was set up in 2004, and in 2004 and 2005 workshops were held on the subject at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre in the UK and the Pendle Hill Center for Quaker Study and Contemplation in the US (ibid.). In 2005 a planning committee was instigated which resulted in the publication the following year of the aforementioned collection of nontheist Quaker writings in *Godless for God's*

Sake (2012:6). As mentioned above in the Introduction (§0.1), 2011 saw the establishment of NFN UK, which was accepted as a listed informal group (Quaker Recognised Body) –see §0.1 – by Britain Yearly Meeting, suggesting some tentative recognition (Boulton 2012:7; 2016:5), and the proportion of Quakers claiming not to believe in God has also increased.

Overall, the presence of nontheism within Liberal Quakerism has grown in terms of the proportion of subscribers to nontheism and the level of visibility and/or recognition it receives. This along with the forthcoming revision of the *Book of Discipline* has increasingly stimulated Quakers to engage with the issue more directly – engagements which are key for this thesis.

(3.4) Accommodation Along Lines of Universalist Assumptions

It is crucial to note here that there is still a prevalent line of response to the issue of nontheism which holds that the divide is primarily due to differences in language and expression rather than differences in belief or the content of religious experience (Plüss, 2007:261,265; 1995:126). The response holds therefore that the debate may be resolved and nontheists accommodated along the lines of the quasi-orthodox universalist-type assumptions detailed in Chapter 1. This leads to questions of whether the worldviews under consideration are being correctly labelled and whether this is creating a greater sense of division than there actually is in terms of belief. The present section considers more closely the extent to which reconciliation with nontheists along these lines may succeed. However, while the section notes that some forms of nontheism do seem amenable to such a

reconciliation, it ultimately affirms that the Boulton–Cupitt nontheist view is at odds with the former accommodating assumptions. Therefore, if these forms are incorporated, they still present a problem to the question of Liberal Quakerism's sense of coherence or 'orthodoxy'.

In reply to this type of response, near the beginning of *Godless for God's Sake* Boulton considers the question of whether 'nontheists' should adopt a label at all, along with the suggestion that labelling of the sub-group may cause division and that perhaps they should simply stay with the more general label of 'Quaker' or 'Friend' (2006:7). He defends the adoption of the nontheist label on the grounds of utility, 'clarity and integrity', saying that:

> Religious labels have the useful function of distinguishing one group from another … the is the function of labels on jam pots: they usefully distinguish the strawberry from the raspberry. A grocery store that insisted on labelling them all 'jam', without distinction, would cause unnecessary confusion and irritation. The purpose of labelling is the avoidance of confusion and the promotion of clarity … it makes sense for clarity to distinguish between theist and nontheist conceptual frameworks. Those who charge that this is unnecessarily divisive are often simply wishing that the distinctions were not there, or preferring to pretend that they don't exist. (ibid.)

The thinking behind these 'charges', however, is somewhat more complex and nuanced than the wishful thinking Boulton attributes to it. This stems from the fact that the phenomenon many Quakers take to be at the core of their religion is not one that can easily be empirically tested, such as the flavour of a pot of jam, but rather an internalised religious experience. The only access people have to the religious experiences of other people is through their descriptions and expressions of it in language. The testing of the level of

correspondence between two or more peoples' experience comes down to an interplay of interpretations, that is, an interpretation of whether peoples' descriptive interpretations of their personal experience relate to experiences with either common or differing origin(s) and/or content (Gort, 1992:47). Individuals advocating such a view should not be understood as simply ignoring distinctions, but are rather countering them via a claim that the distinctions derive not from differences in the religious experiences of the individuals, but rather from the linguistic terms used to express them. In the context of this line of discussion, the key question around which the theism–nontheism issue revolves is whether or not nontheists agree with this universalist assumption concerning the relation between the Quaker religious experience and its expression in language. If nontheists agree that there is a common experience and are simply asserting that they prefer not to use theistic language to refer to this experience, then the nontheists could be incorporated via an acceptance that nontheistic terminology can also be used to refer to the common Quaker experience, along lines delineated by Grant (2014).

Given the diversity of views that exist within the Quaker nontheist group, there are some views held among nontheists that could be reconciled along these lines, as this section examines. However, at least a prominent element within nontheism – the Boulton–Cupitt line – advocates an essentially inverted view of the relationship between religious experience and language: namely, that there is no internal experience separate from (or even prior to) the (constructionist-type) influence of cultural-linguistic structures (Cupitt, 1985:220). It seems less likely that this 'nontheistic' position can be as easily reconciled along universalist lines, as its subscribers do not hold the view of a common influencing

experience. Lindbeck clarifies this quite starkly when considering the potential for a 'universalist' view of religious experience from the perspective of his similar 'cultural-linguistic' theological outlook:

> In a cultural-linguistic outlook … it is just as hard to think of religions as it is to think of cultures or languages as having a single generic or universal experiential essence … One can in this outlook no more be religious in general than one can speak language in general. Thus the focus is on particular religions rather than religious universals. The results of this particularity may be useful for the restricted … end of promoting unity within a single religion, but not the broader purpose of seeking unity of all religions. (Lindbeck, 2009:9)

There is some evidence that nontheists share sensibilities found more widely amongst Liberal Quakers concerning the linguistic expression of religious views. The very deliberation and misgivings expressed by the contributors to *Godless For God's Sake* over labels (see §3.1) is reflective of a more general Quaker suspicion around language, characterised in relation to Dandelion's concept of a 'culture of silence' as a 'caution given [to] words and … [a] philosophical caution given to theology as a sufficient description of experience' (2008a:22). It is questionable, however, whether the caution expressed by the contributors to *Godless for God's Sake* concerning labelling is motivated by comparable views around the nature of the Quaker religious experience and its linguistic expression. The broader caution operated by Quakers typically stems from a view that language is insufficient for describing an ineffable mystical experience. This again falls in line with the Quaker universalist view. Therefore, deliberations over language use are typically framed around a concern to properly capture a common experience, and the caution is motivated by a view of language as an inadequate descriptive tool in relation to this experience. This does not seem to be the concern at the heart of the nontheists' deliberations over labelling. These seem to be less

about the endeavour to capture something about a common yet ineffable experience, and more about the 'nontheists' wanting their own individualised views on religious belief, religious practice and/or organisational structures (and the interaction between them) to be accurately expressed, whilst still being able to present themselves as a group. This may dialectically appear to be very similar to the process Quakers have previously engaged with concerning their broader theological diversity. However, there appears to be a shift away from an endeavour primarily conceived as trying to accurately capture the nature of a mystical religious experience towards one concerned with accurately representing and incorporating the views of individuals within the group.

Nevertheless, given the diversity of (a)theological views held amongst nontheists, some of the worldviews expressed by self-identified nontheists may fit within a 'universalist' framework, and nontheists do typically express an affinity with Quaker universalists. Boulton identifies John Linton's establishment of the Quaker Universalist Group in 1977 as leading the way for nontheism. He quotes Linton's statement that: 'the Society would be greatly strengthened by the influx of people who claim to be agnostic rather than Christian and yet who sincerely share the fundamental aspirations of Quakers' (Linton, 2004; also in Boulton 2012:4). Here, questions may be asked about how close Boulton's understanding is to Linton's around the nature of agnosticism.[55] Being a 'Quaker universalist', Linton may have held an agnosticism around the nature of the Quaker religious experience and whether it is exclusively accessible and expressible within a Christian framework. He still, however, advocated a belief that there was a common mystical religious experience, against the view

[55] As was discussed in §1.3.1.

of religion as entirely man-made (Linton, 2004:5-6). In his promotion of nontheism, Boulton seemingly extends this questioning over the nature of religious experience to considering and/or expressing a view of there being no definitive common/ontological/pre-linguistic content to said experience. This seems to go beyond the already broad scope of what Quaker universalism accommodates as permissible within Quaker theology.

Furthermore, other nontheists (as previously indicated) can be seen espousing views more in line with the Quaker universalists than those of Boulton–Cupitt line: these essentially are those Quakers who identify as nontheist and are open to there being a 'mystical' basis for the Quaker religious experience, but do not find theistic language appropriate for their personal expression of the experience. This was the type of phenomenon observed by Dandelion during his research in the 1990s, where he noted that Quakers he encountered who self-identified as atheist or agnostic were typically 'denying one particular view of God' rather advocating a denial of there being any divine element to the Quaker religious experience (1996:158). Moreover, as mentioned previously, at what was probably the first Quaker 'nontheist workshop' in 1976, '[m]ost [attenders] were non-theists who … [believed] in something universal beyond our biological selves which exists in everyone … [but did] not believe in an external directing spirit' ('Report from Nontheistic Friends' Workshop,' 2005). This type of view still seemingly makes up components of Quaker nontheism as it is now being explicitly expressed. Commenting on the essays in *Godless for God's Sake*, Paul Anderson notes that:

> Most of the contributors believed in some sort of spiritual reality we might term as 'God' but had problems with particular descriptions of that reality. If that is indeed

> the case, I'm not sure they should see themselves as strict atheists or nontheists; they are actually doing theology. (2012:4)

This observation was also noted within the book by the 'nontheist' David Rush, who frames the divide as potentially revolving around what Quakers mean by the term God:

> One very important gap in knowledge concerns what Quakers mean when they speak of God, quite apart from the question of belief. This writer senses that the theist/non-theist divide is far more fluid than we have supposed, and that we will find this divide often to be a false one. (2006:106)

Even Boulton has described some nontheists who ' … choose not to use the word "God" themselves but are happy to "translate" it when it is used by other Friends in written or spoken ministry or in conversation' (2006:8). This resonates with Ben 'Pink' Dandelion's call (when writing internally) for readers to 'translate' or 'hear where the words come from' (2010). This metaphor of 'translation' implicitly suggests that there is some common meaning that the words are referring to and that the difference simply lies in the linguistic expression. However, given Boulton's affinity with Cupitt's non-realist theology, questions may be raised over whether he views this act of translation as entirely commensurate.

The 'typical' Quaker, universalist-type accommodating tactic of placing conflict and misunderstandings as arising primarily from differences in expression (Plüss, 2007:261,265, 1995:126) can also be seen in more recent discussions specifically concerning the issue of nontheism. At the February 2016 theology think tank the 'theists' present objected to the label of 'theist', believing it was causing division. They claimed that many nontheists

misunderstand what many other Quakers mean when they (the 'theists') employ God-speak. They emphasised the diversity of Quaker belief outside of nontheism, alongside the fact that many Quakers categorised by the nontheists as 'theists' do not hold conventional concepts of God – and hold reservations about the adequacy of a single term to capture the nature of the religious experience. Those present instead opted for the term 'non-nontheists' to denote that they were primarily having to identify their position in response to the increasingly more explicit expression of Quaker nontheism (Rowlands, 2017:49,55,67). In emphasising that the make-up of Quaker 'non-nontheist' beliefs is more complex and multifaceted than is recognised by nontheists, non-nontheists may also be intimating that the divide may be exaggerated, and that there may be a route for reconciliation perhaps along universalist-type lines. However, the fact that they are explicitly identifying their position in response to nontheism may suggest some recognition of selected, more genuine (a)theological differences.

With regard to accommodating universalist assumptions, it must be said that some nontheists (e.g. Rush) are amenable to this framework. It therefore seems that the Religious Society of Friends can move to internally resolve the gap between some nontheists and the 'non-nontheists' along these lines. Following Grant's conception of list structures, this may be accomplished via the addition of some acknowledging nontheistic terms in the lists Quakers compile relating to terms they consider applicable to the Quaker religious experience – including in the form of extracts in the forthcoming edition of the *Book of Discipline*. This is could still be done, however, under the bracketing 'second-order rule' governing the manner in which terms are permitted on the list pertaining to their related

universalist assumptions (Grant 2014:178)[56]. Seemingly, this would nullify the supposed challenge of nontheism within Liberal Quakerism, lending acknowledgement to some Quakers' use of nontheistic language. This would avoid much effectual change to the assumptions, referents and/or notions of religious experience currently underpinning Quaker concepts of theological orthodoxy.

This thesis, however, is not primarily concerned with those Quaker nontheists that can be accommodated along universalist lines, but with the impact and/or methods of reconciliation of those elements of Quaker nontheism, largely akin to the Boulton–Cupitt line, that seemingly cannot be incorporated in this manner, including those that seem to be pushing the boundaries of Quaker theological diversity and permissibility (Dandelion 2008a:22) and those that seem to require a change in Liberal Quakerism's underpinning 'orthodox' accommodating assumptions.

(3.5) Signs of a Broader Desire to Recognise Quaker Difference: Beyond Accommodating Universalist Assumptions

One important question which bears consideration is why Liberal Quakers would not simply reject Boulton and those nontheists who cannot be reconciled along universalist lines? This would allow them to stand by universalism's role as an accommodating orthodoxy and

[56] Discussed in §1.3.3.

permit a diversity of theological expression within given limits and contingent upon the background assumption of a universal origin to religious experience. This is essentially the line Derek Guiton takes against nontheism in *A Man That Looks on Glass: Standing Up for God in the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)* (2015). Examining Quaker reactions to this publication will therefore usefully demonstrate that this is unlikely to be a route of response that prominently informs Quakers' revision of their 'orthodoxy'.

A Man That Looks on Glass is a self-published book from Guiton, thus falling into the sphere of Quaker popular literature on the issue of theism–nontheism. It is principally an impassioned polemic against Quaker nontheism (specifically the Boulton–Cupitt form). The book's back cover makes the following statement:

> The Quaker movement in Britain is beset with problems – growing secularisation, incompatible belief systems, ideology as a substitute for faith … *A Man that Looks on Glass …* challenges the supposed inevitability of the 'Godless' strand in British Quakerism (Guiton, 2015)

In his introduction, Guiton makes it clear that the '"Godless" strand in British Quakerism' that the book seeks to challenge is primarily the style of nontheism promoted by Boulton:

> It is one of the aims of this book to counter the extraordinary persuasive power that the Cupitt–Boulton version of non-realism has exerted in the Religious Society of Friends over the last thirty years. (2015:vi).

Guiton's response to this challenge, as mentioned above, is essentially an affirmation of the universalist line: that it is necessary to subscribe to a belief in a common 'mystical experience' (2015:30) in order to qualify as a Quaker. Guiton also correlates his notion of

mystical experience and his notions of 'mystical theism' (2015:259), 'Quaker Theism' (2015:185) and 'divine transcendence' – in Guiton's view a concept of 'God's reality considered apart from the physical universe' (2015:221). He notes that some nontheists, whom he terms 'mystical' or 'seeker' nontheists, may be open 'towards the transcendent' and he encourages them to be more comfortable with the use of theistic or even traditional Christian theological language (2015:230). However, he makes it clear that he views the Boulton–Cupitt line of nontheism as an 'alien belief system' with no place within the Religious Society of Friends (2015:164).

A fairly clear statement he gives of his argument is that: 'we need a minimal criterion or boundary line for membership … that is … an attitude of openness to no more than the possibility of the transcendent' (Guiton, cited in: Wood, 2016d). The fact that he frames this requirement as merely being open to a 'possibility of the transcendent' illustrates an avoidance of speaking in theological certainties which Quakers may find uncomfortable (Dandelion, 2008a:33-36). However, the quote also indicates that the type of theological uncertainty Guiton views as permissible within the Society of Friends is not absolute and does not extend to nontheism. For Guiton the group's theological concerns, whatever their degree of certainty, still have to revolve around (the possibility/seeking of or engagement with) a mystical/transcendent experience.

Quaker reactions to *A Man that Looks on Glass* are once again diverse and mixed. There are signs of some individuals within Liberal Quakerism agreeing with Guiton's view. Letters

written to the popular Quaker general-interest publication *The Friend* have expressed support:

> Our Friend, in his book, speaks my mind … Having read the introduction to Derek Guiton's book *A Man that Looks on Glass* – available online – I see echoes of my own most recent essay: 'The Challenges of Change'. The Society of Friends in Britain is being faced with its most difficult challenge yet. We need to decide if it is possible now to become again the Society of the Friends of Truth. (Sandy, 2016)

Overall, however, Guiton's position has been viewed as too polarising. In general it seems Quakers are opting to try and reconcile and negotiate their differences, even if a prominent element of Quaker nontheism cannot be accommodated within a universalist framework. This reaction adds credibility to the perspicacity and utility of Dandelion's concept of Quakers' operating an 'absolute perhaps' and a prescription towards constant seeking (Dandelion, 2008a:33-36), and suggests that the limits of 'absolute perhaps' for the broader Liberal Quaker group are liable to be pushed beyond a universalist-type view on religious experience.

On his popular online blog *The Armchair Theologian,* the Quaker theologian Ben Wood responded to *A Man That Looks on Glass* by suggesting that Quakers have the conceptual resources to move past (beyond) the two-sided debate between Boulton and Guiton. Indeed, he suggests that seeking such a solution beyond the posed dichotomy of theism vs. nontheism may be more authentically Quaker:

> … Might Friends dare to strike out anew in the hope of seeing the extent of the possible? Do we believe our story can carry us there? I sense that Bolton and Guiton are both equally philosophically hardened to this kind of attitude because they both treat God as a transcendental hypothesis to be dismissed or defended … I don't think Friends should be distressed if Guiton and Boulton wish to slog the matter out until

> the cows come home, as long as we realize that such conversation is of secondary importance to the task of *being* Quaker … (Wood, 2016c)

In Boulton's own response to Guiton, a short publication entitled *Through A Glass Darkly* (2016), one can also see him validating the reasonableness of his position in contrast to Guiton (primarily to a target audience of other Liberal Quakers) by emphasizing his openness to a broad tolerance and lack of didactic theological certainty:

> I recognise that I have sometimes overstated my argument … But I have never believed or argued the preposterous case that mine is the only 'true' position (2016:15-16)
>
> I want a Religious Society of Friends that includes us both. You want one that excludes some of us who can't share your particular theology of transcendence (2016:62).

In other words, Boulton is moving himself closer to a position of (an extended) 'absolute perhaps' rather than 'zealously overstating' his position as he may have done in the past.

Subsequently, Liberal Quakers can be seen to have reacted well to the more delicate tone of Boulton's response; indeed, the general Quaker response to the issue of theism–nontheism follows an approach of avoiding definitive proclamations, but instead encouraging further discussion, as demonstrated by the sentiments conveyed by Quakers in these letters to *The Friend*:

> … *[Through a glass darkly*] a nuanced, thoughtful book that is very worth reading even if, like me, you may disagree with aspects of it. The author argues that the growth of nontheism is a 'widespread and complex phenomenon'. (Kirk-Smith, 2016)

> The discussion on this topic seems to have become polarized at the two edges, leaving out a huge chunk in the middle. When debates become polarised like this it is never helpful, though I respect David Boulton's attempt in his latest book, *Through a glass darkly*, to try and find an amicable way through it … At the end of the day, though, it really does not matter. What does matter is whether or not your particular vision helps you to become more loving and compassionate or not …. (Eddleston, 2017)

> The philosophical assumptions of non-realism certainly need to be debated further. But what may, indeed, finally prove to be a fatal undermining influence within the Religious Society of Friends in a closed reading, might, by the same token, be a vital source for our renewal in an open reading of it. (Norman, 2017)

Furthermore, Boulton, along with other nontheists (including Michael Wright, the secretary of NFN UK), was invited to take part in the think tank setup by the *Book of Discipline* Revision Preparation Group (Boulton, 2016:57-58): a clear indication that on an organisational level Liberal Quakers do have a desire and an intent to engage with Boulton's 'non-realist' style of nontheism ahead of the revision of the *Book of Discipline*.

One especially significant development in these discussions on theism–nontheism is that there are signs of Quakers' moving away from claims that their different expressions of belief ultimately relate to a common religious experience, instead becoming more attentive to the differences and particularities of views expressed by individuals within the group. The *God, Words and Us* (Rowlands, 2017) publication that evolved from the discussions at the 2016 think tank admittedly did contain statements suggestive of the typical Quaker suspicion that divergences in language can create artificial conflict, saying that: 'Words can be used to divide and to hurt, and they can create false oppositions … ' (2017:2). However,

within the book, numerous calls can also be found to acknowledge difference, to allow individuals to represent their beliefs on their own terms and to explore the details of other's beliefs:

> Diversity of belief and language among Friends is real and should be acknowledged. … Diversity is a gift in/to the Quaker community. Difference need not prevent us from working together for the common good. (2017:55)
>
> The Quaker community needs to engage in open dialogue on a continual basis … If labels are needed to describe people's beliefs, they should be self-chosen and not imposed on others. (2017:2)
>
> If someone self-describes with a label such as 'Christian' or 'nontheist', it is important to explore what the label actually means for them – it is very easy to jump to conclusions that are not what they meant (2017:17)

This links in with the extracts of the *Book of Discipline* discussed in §1.3.3 as well as Plüss' conceptualisation of 'epistemological collectivism' and Dandelion's related 'absolute perhaps' (Dandelion, 2008a:33-36; Plüss, 1995:111). However, the difference here is that this move towards 'perhapsness' and/or collectivism is being done in order to incorporate nontheist views, some of which, when delved into, are directly at odds with the accommodating theological rationale of Quaker universalism. Whilst giving a talk at a Woodbrooke workshop called 'The Impact of Diversity of Belief on Quaker Practice', in September 2017 Rowlands claimed that participants at the think tank were quite clear that they were not talking about the same experiences but with different words. This acknowledgement would seem to suggest that the universalist accommodation is breaking down. Indeed, even the limits of the 'absolute perhaps' – which hold some utility for understanding the dynamics at play – are put under tension by those elements of nontheism that seem to question the spiritual enterprise.

This feeds back into the question over how Liberal Quakers may seek to formulate their notions of a coherent identity and/or sense of orthodoxy given that it seems they are attempting to accommodate nontheist views including the Boulton–Cupitt line. Since Boulton seems to be softening his position to concur with a certain notion of 'absolute perhaps', it may be tempting to assume this offers a route to reconciliation. However, in itself this raises questions over how such a boundary function manifests and/or whether it can be internally codified (perhaps within the *Book of Discipline*) by a group that is seemingly reflexively confronting its own sites of tension within this debate. Dandelion's behavioural creed offers another potential route. As is examined in Chapter 4, Quakers are increasingly making internal claims that orthopraxy (rather than any sense of common theology or orthodoxy) should the basis for a common liberal Quaker identity. However, Chapter 4 also further explores how there are divergences in the internal interpretations of the make-up and extent of Quaker practice (aligning with issues considered in Chapter 2). It discusses how Quaker appeals to orthopraxy blend with Quaker reflections on belief to feed into the construction of more discursive theological notions and potential candidates for neo-orthodoxy. Such developments are delineated in Chapters 4 and 5 primarily as reflexive-structural responses and alteristic responses respectively.

(3.6) Conclusion

This chapter has given an overview of the nature of growth of Quaker nontheism as it currently exists within Liberal Quakerism. The chapter particularly focuses on the form of nontheism advocated by David Boulton, which is primarily inspired by the non-realist theology of Don Cupitt; it is this form that is most prominently promoted in popular Quaker literature.

The chapter considered the extent to which Quaker nontheists may be internally/theologically accommodated along universalist-type lines. It demonstrated that, while some Quaker nontheists may be reconciled along these lines, the universalist stance is not compatible with the Boulton–Cupitt form of nontheism.

The chapter reflected on whether or not Liberal Quakers are likely to draw their theological boundaries around universalist-type assumptions and simply exclude those individuals who hold incompatible beliefs (i.e. those in line with Boulton–Cupitt) from the Religious Society of Friends. The chapter argued that Liberal Quakers are unlikely to view such an exclusivist move as appropriate; rather, they favour further discussion in less polarised terms. This reaction is taken to largely align with Dandelion's formulation of the 'absolute perhaps'. The manner in which Boulton has emphasised a softening of his position also lends credence to

Dandelion's claim that Quakers operate a prescription for 'absolute perhaps' on theological matters.

The concern of the next two chapters is to examine the dynamics of Liberal Quakers who are now engaging in constructing neo-orthodoxy. If the universalist theological assumptions are no longer sufficient to bracket the internally accepted diversity of Quaker theology, then what replaces it? Are the boundary functions performed by the 'behavioural creed' and 'absolute perhaps' explicitly taken up and reflexively theologised by Liberal Quakers (Dandelion 2008a:25-36)? If so, are they sufficient to lend Quakers a sense of cohesive theological orthodoxy or indeed orthopraxy? What does the process look like: are these new boundary markers accepted or further 'deconstructed'? The next two chapters will seek to examine and elucidate the process by which Quakers are currently constructing neo-orthodoxy. They will do so by examining discussions drawn from Quaker popular literature and online blogs, and by offering an analytical comparison with developments of postmodern thought and/or theology.

Chapter 4

Emerging Quaker Views (1): Reflexive-Structural Responses

(4.0) Introduction

This chapter focuses on demonstrating and exploring the stream of emerging views labelled in this thesis as reflexive-structural. Given that the Boulton–Cupitt view of religion is to a degree a reflexive-structural one, the chapter opens by considering in more detail how Boulton–Cupitt style nontheists seek to position themselves as having an authentic place within the wider Quaker community. In the Quaker popular literature nontheists primarily attempt to do this via two conceptual moves:

(1) They reinterpret the Quaker 'religious experience' as referring to an individualised 'religious' journey and then move to claim that they are 'seekers', positioning this orientation to seeking as relating to being authentically Quaker – in line with Dandelion's 'absolute perhaps' (2008a:33-36);

(2) They claim that the Quaker group maintains communal coherence via adherence to a common behaviour and/or practice – partly in line with Dandelion's behavioural creed (2008a:25-33, 1996:100-110).

Thus, these nontheists are largely conforming to Dandelion's sociological formulations around Quaker coherence, at points directly referencing Dandelion's work. These positions are thus indicative of the reflexivity of sociological critique viewed by Giddens as typical of late modernity (1991). The chapter notes that many Quakers more broadly (i.e. not Boulton–Cupitt nontheists) are making similar reflexive-internal appeals to practice as a

basis for coherence within the broader Quaker group, including publications that are more closely related to British Quakerism's institutional structures (Kirk-Smith, 2013; Rowlands, 2017).

Consequently, the chapter considers the extent to which orthopraxy is shifting to be internally and explicitly promoted as the primary basis for the coherence of Liberal Quakerism as a cohesive religious group – with the role of discursive theological claims being 'marginalised' (2008a:22, 1996:290). However, the chapter explores ways in which the Quaker discursive landscape may be said to be re-opening in ways that may potentially relate to internal understanding of the Quaker identity and/or theological 'orthodoxy'. The manner in which some Quakers (both nontheists and non-nontheists) internally align with behavioural features as a basis for cohesion is not exactly a clear-cut reflexive deployment of Dandelion's concept. The chapter notes that Quakers' internal, multifarious and idiosyncratic interpretations and expanded interpretations of Quaker practice may bring in considerations of features such as Quaker values – features with potentially more discursive content. The chapter further examines the potentially expanded notions of Quaker practice in reference to Quaker testimonies, an element of the Quaker culture which Dandelion himself places as split between the Quaker 'double-culture' (1996:121-123).

The chapter further considers the comparable academic formulations of Collins (2002a, 2002b, 2002c) and Grant (2014).[57] These again suggest that there may be typical Quaker 'practices' which contain more discursive elements. Grant suggests that Liberal Quakers respond to their diverse belief culture via a 'practice' constructing list-format remarks

[57] Discussed in §2.5.1.

following implicit grammatical type rules (2014:129), even further suggesting that these rules have theological implications (2014:164). Collins similarly suggests that Quakers are collectively engaged in constructing a certain 'genre' of Quaker discourse with reference to which one can learn a certain 'feel for the game' of Liberal Quakerism (2002b:292). The chapter notes that such formulations have utility in illuminating how nontheist Quakers position themselves within Quakerism. However, with reference to these academic formulations, the chapter ultimately seeks to demonstrate that, as with appeals to orthopraxy, Liberal Quakers are making reflexive internal appeals to broader and more discursive, communally constructed and/or recognised structures (be they historical, traditional, narrative and/or idiomatic) as a basis for a common sense of Liberal Quaker identity and/or orthodoxy. The chapter seeks to demonstrate this via an engagement with the internal output of Quaker commentators and bloggers (Daniels, 2015a; Wood, 2016a, 2016b; Russ 2017).

(4.1) Nontheist Framings of Their Quaker Authenticity

Initial considering is required of the manner via which Boulton–Cupitt style nontheists, who do not hold to a universalist view of a common mystical experience, generally align themselves as authentically Quaker. This can be delimited as comprising two key conceptual moves. The first of which entails a self-identification as 'seekers' – an alignment with what Dandelion has identified as a Liberal Quaker boundary-function prescription of constant seeking or the 'absolute perhaps' (2008:33-36). In the popular literary output from nontheists, this type of claim can most clearly be clearly be seen in the introductory leaflet to NFN UK, wherein Boulton expounds:

> Whether we describe ourselves as humanists, agnostics or atheists, and whether we understand God as the symbol and imagined embodiment of our highest human values or avoid the word altogether, nontheist Friends know that we don't know it all. Our various ways of being nontheist are simply various ways of being Quaker, and we celebrate the radical diversity of Quakerism, nontheist and theist. We do not see ourselves as on the Quaker fringe but as part of the broad mainstream, with something to give and much to learn from the ongoing Quaker tradition. We too are Friends and seekers. (Boulton, 2011, cited in: Boulton, 2012:6-7)

The assertion that 'nontheist Friends know that we don't know it all' can clearly be related to Dandelion's characterisation of the 'absolute perhaps' in terms of Quakers being 'absolutely certain (rationally) that they can never be certain (theologically)' (2008:35), and the self-description of nontheists as 'seekers' falls in line with Dandelion's alternative terminology concerning 'the prescription of seeking' (2008:34).

However, it is pertinent to ask: what exactly do nontheistic Quakers take themselves to be seeking? Quakerism originated with a principle of knowing the divine primarily through experience (Dandelion, 2005:5-6). Liberal Quakerism decoupled the experience from scripture but sought to further emphasise its primacy (Dandelion, 2007:129-30, 2008:22). The Boulton–Cupitt strand of nontheism, however, holds that there can be no such experience prior to its construction within cultural-linguistic structures (Cupitt, 1985:220). Boulton–Cupitt nontheists cannot position themselves as seeking a common Quaker experience in the same manner as those Quakers who hold universalist-type assumptions. It may therefore be asked in what sense can they hold themselves to be authentically Quaker when they do not even hold a notion of religious experience such as that which seems so central to the religion? Even if the religion is characterised as one of seeking, claiming to be

a ‘seeker’ in a manner completely divorced from any notion of religious experience does not resonate well as an authentic Quaker position – a principle which is still often underscored:

> … a basic principle—the most fundamental to the Liberal Quaker Faith—[is the] *intimate experience of the divine* … (Dutton, 2012, emphasis original)
>
> Quakers rate experience highly among all the ways humans have of knowing (Yeo, 2013:33)

In light of the centrality of religious experience in the Quaker religion, it may be expected that nontheists (holding to authentic Quakerism) do not position themselves as being devoid of a concern for religious experience. Rather, what can be seen in the literary output is a move to reinterpret the Quaker religious experience to include individualised notions of religious experience, and understandings of religious experience not as something common but as particular to the lives and cultural contexts of certain individuals. In his 2012 article for *Quaker Religious Thought* Boulton directly relates the nontheist experience to a view of Quakerism not necessitating ‘any supernatural … underpinning’, and he positions this as deriving from the [individual] ‘living’ and ‘free thought’ of said nontheist Quakers:

> We see no necessity for any supernatural or metaphysical underpinning of the Quaker way: that is our *experience*, the fruit of our *experimental* living and free thought … We claim no superior understanding, and trust that those whose experience takes them to a different theology will themselves make no such claim. We expect Friends to be true to their experience, and we hope to be true to ours. (Boulton, 2012:9, emphasis original)

Notably, Boulton defends this as an acceptable view to take of religious experience in a Liberal Quaker framework, again with reference to sensibilities representative of the

'absolute perhaps'. He emphasises that nontheists 'claim no superior understanding' and requests that 'non-non-theist' Quakers admit them in kind.

However, Boulton–Cupitt nontheists do not solely frame authentic Quakerism as following subjective experiences and seeking to compose worldviews regardless of context. This would still leave nontheists open to the question: what ties together this enterprise as coherently and definitively Quaker, and what gives it the character of religiosity? Indeed, a second move can be found in their output to claim that Quaker coherence and/or authenticity is based on practice, for which they typically claim to maintain respect. This tallies with key claims made within the Cupittian Sea of Faith Network, which places religion as being concerned with cultural practices rather than belief (Davies and Northam-Jones, 2012). It can also be seen to fit with Dandelion's behavioural creed. However, there is a difference in that SoFN members generally make this as an emic claim concerning the way they engage with religion (ibid.). Dandelion devised the behavioural creed as an academic (etic) sociological concept relating to how Quakers maintain coherence (2008a:25-33, 1996:100-110). Liberal Quakers who make such appeals to practice may be seen to be moving to internally (emically) making a reflective claim that practice is the basis what is common and distinctive to the Quaker identity – what coheres Quakers as group.

Evidence of the prevalence of such a move may be found in the internal popular output of the Liberal Quaker group. In one of his articles for *Friends Quarterly*, Hugh Rock, a popular Quaker writer who identifies as nontheist ('Regional Conference in Bristol,' 2017), advances

the claim that Quaker theology has a major tenet that: 'religion is qualified by what is done, not what is professed' (2014b:25). Rock develops his nontheistic stance in a way that deviates somewhat from the Boulton–Cupitt line.[58] The significant point here, however, is that he makes the claim that Quakerism as a religion is a defined by 'what is done' rather than professed beliefs.

Stephen Yeo is another Quaker commentator who has made internal claims that what is distinctive and defining about the Liberal Quaker religion lies in a sense of common practice rather than belief:

> Does the writ of Quaker discipline run over deeds rather than creeds? … I want to ask whether our beliefs centre on more-than-individual practices. Orthopraxis is a better word for us than orthodoxy … (Yeo, 2013:30-31)

Yeo does not appear to explicitly adopt the label of nontheist in his output. However, he concludes his latest book, *A Useable Past? Volume 1: Victorian Agitator George Jacob Holyoake: Co-operation as 'This New Order of Life'* (2017) by considering the possibility of the 'religion of co-operation' and/or 'a benign, this-worldly "religion"' (2017:157,185). Boulton certainly seems to count Yeo among the nontheists, stating in a review of his book that:

> The pleasure of reading this book is its constant reminders that the dilemmas, dreams and preoccupations of those of us who hope to build the republic of heaven now that God is no longer on the throne, have history. (Boulton, 2018)

[58] Rock's position is explored in more detail in §5.2.2.

Both Rock and Yeo, however, diverge from the Boulton–Cupitt line in the development of religious views, speaking to how the diversity of Quaker belief makes it difficult to categorise the views of individual Quakers.

At points, Quaker nontheists make this conceptual move – towards claiming practice as the basis for a common Quaker identity – via a direct deployment of Dandelion's sociological work. Dandelion can be found quoted on the first website set up by Quaker nontheists; its positioning on the webpage seems to frame the quote as legitimising nontheists' place within the group:

> In 'Quakers – a very short introduction' Ben Pink Dandelion explains that Liberal Quakerism *is not defined in terms of doctrine but in terms of the form of Quakerism … its worship and business method, its testimony and values. Belief is plural but also marginal.* (Dandelion, 2008b:70; 'What is Nontheism?', 2017, emphasis from website)

This aligns with the earlier work of the present thesis concerning Liberal Quakers' understanding of meaning being influenced by the reflexivity of late modernity as delineated by Giddens (1991). This observation is starkly demonstrated in this last example, where the NFN UK is quoting directly from Dandelion's sociological work rather than, as potentially they could have done, their own paralleling self-reflections. One might criticise the nontheists behind this webpage here for slippage: they are utilising Dandelion's sociological formulation, which is based on observations concerning how Quakers operate and cohere as a group, to make an implicit normative claim that this is the legitimate basis for Quaker coherence – thereby validating their position within the group. However, this is

somewhat irrelevant to the concerns of this thesis. For the thesis, the significant point is that these types of formulations are becoming prevalent in Quakers' internal understandings of their group in a way that may influence emerging Quaker views and constructions of neo-orthodoxy – or, in this case, orthopraxy. This objection would be more relevant if it were prevalent in the internal discussions of Liberal Quakers. However, as §4.2 explores, such appeals to orthopraxy as a basis for the Quaker identity actually appear more broadly among the Quaker group, including by individuals that fall outside of the nontheist bracket and certainly outside of the Boulton–Cupitt expression of nontheism. Moreover, such appeals are appearing in internal Quaker outputs closely related to the institutional and/or organisational structures of British Liberal Quakerism. This may suggest that they may have a significant influence on the expression of Quakerism in the forthcoming revision of the *Book of Discipline*.

One might also say that it is predictable that some Quaker nontheists would make such reflexive claims around sociological formulations, as they fit with the Boulton–Cupitt nontheist understanding of religion – itself informed by a reflexivity of academic insights. Here it is important to make a distinction in that such appeals to orthopraxy, whilst seemingly informed by a comparable dynamic of reflexivity, may still bypass the non-realist claims concerning experience being constructed by and secondary to socio-cultural-linguistic structures. They can, rather, remain silent on any theological belief claims relating to the nature of experience, allowing a permissive belief culture – potentially beyond universalist assumptions – and conserving coherence based purely on practice. Therefore, the framing reflects Dandelion's sociological understanding of Quakerism – except that now

this framing is being internally and explicitly advocated as a potential route to resolving the issue of Quaker (a)theological diversity and the theism–nontheism division.

(4.2) Broader Quaker Appeals to Orthopraxy

A demonstration of a non-nontheist Liberal Quaker's explicitly and reflexively utilising such sociological concepts to inform his internal view of Liberal Quaker theology can be seen in the American Liberal Quaker Zachary Dutton's blog post 'Bounded Mystery: Towards a Contemporary Liberal Quaker Theology' (2012). Dutton explicitly notes and employs sociological/anthropological concepts from Dandelion, Collins and Plüss in developing his 'contemporary Liberal Quaker theology'. In his conclusion he notes that:

> Liberal Quakerism is truly dynamic because it does not emphasize the *what* but the *how.* What we believe, and what we practice are trivial concerns when compared to *how* we believe and *how* we practice. (Dutton, 2012)

This clearly echoes Dandelion's framing of the 'absolute perhaps' which, in a chapter that Dutton references in his blog post (2012), says that 'Liberal Quakerism is held together not by what it believes, but by how it believes' (2008:34). Dutton's concern for the mode of practice also reflects Dandelion's concept of the behavioural creed – along with Collins' concern for 'habitus' (2002a) and Plüss' concern for socialisation (2007).

Regarding the broader prominence of these developments and their concomitant potential for influencing notions of 'neo-orthodoxy' (or orthopraxy) as presented in the *Book of Discipline,* clear evidence of such influence can be seen in this 2013 bulletin from Meeting for Sufferings on the very subject of the *Book of Discipline*'s revision and purpose:

> … the purpose of the Book of Discipline was 'to reflect our 'orthopraxy' – the things we do together so we have a shared understanding of our church government' … A Friend said that one of the ideas informing a previous revision was the belief that the faith section should illuminate the practice.
>
> The idea of 'orthopraxy' was raised and it was stressed that words were not 'tablets of stone' but saying 'this is our present practice.' We do not know, a Friend said, where we will be led. (Kirk-Smith, 2013)

Additionally, the concluding section of *God, Words and Us* (Rowlands, 2017), the publication resulting from the February 2016 think tank commissioned by the Revision Preparation Group, seems to affirm this view of the Quaker form of silent worship as the primary basis for what is common to the group:

> We agree that the Religious Society of Friends is a community centred on the practice of waiting, listening, meeting for worship. We agree that differences of understanding about what it is we listen to or worship do not prevent us from practising meeting for worship together. (2017:79)

Both these are demonstrative of Quakers, on a quasi-organisational level – one likely to have an impact on the content of the forthcoming revision of the *Book of Discipline* – moving to internally (emically) and explicitly base their coherence on orthopraxy. Additionally, the stress on the fact that linguistic expressions of the Quaker 'faith and practice' are not fixed tablets in stone is indicative of the prevalence of an attitude of 'absolute perhaps'. It would seem, then, that Liberal Quakerism (whether reflexively influenced or not) is developing much in line with Dandelion's sociological formulations.

This seemingly closes down the Quaker process of constructing of neo-orthodoxy in favour of orthopraxy, Dandelion's seemingly astute observations regarding how Quaker belief

operates on a popular level being carried forward into the revision of the *Book of Discipline* and thus being internally recognised as the basis for coherence on an organisational level. Liberal Quakers would then be not so much constructing a common sense of 'neo-orthodoxy' for the latest *Book of Discipline*, but rather shifting towards orthopraxy; the question over conformity over belief (or orthodoxy) being left open, played out in terms of a difficult-to-discursively-define-or-codify sense of 'absolute perhaps'.

The issue is that the manner in which Liberal Quakers engage with and understand what constitutes Quaker practice is not uniform. Numerous scholars of Quaker Studies have suggested that Quaker practice is not as standardised or stable as it might appear.[59] The theological permissiveness may indeed feed into the breakdown of orthopraxy and fragmentation of the movement more broadly (Hampton, 2014:43; Collins, 2002a:151; Dandelion, 1996:319). Additionally, both external and internal commentators on Liberal Quakerism have developed and suggested notions of Quaker communal practice that extend beyond what Dandelion initially considered as falling under the behavioural creed (1996:100-110). These expanded notions of Quaker practice give Quakers potential discursive resources which have been used by commentators as a basis on which to construct a sense of neo-orthodoxy. Concerning the 'absolute perhaps', these framings may be taken not to entirely contest the notion, but rather detail various ways the attitude might be incorporated, represented and also limited within the Quaker movement. Thereby these expanded delineations potentially offer a thickened understanding of the way the 'absolute perhaps' might manifest, and consequently a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of Liberal Quaker theological development.

[59] See §2.1 and §2.2.

(4.3) Differing and Expanded Notions of Quaker Practice – A Re-opening of the Liberal Quaker Discursive Landscape

The potential influence of expanded concepts of Quaker practice (that is, beyond Dandelion's focus on silent worship) on Quakers' developing more discursive and/or theological views may be seen in Janet Scott's 1980 declaration that 'What matters to Quakers is not the label by which we are called or call ourselves, but the life' (1980:70). Here, to an extent, Scott may be understood as internally paralleling and anticipating Dandelion's sociological claim that what defines Liberal Quakerism is behaviour rather than belief (2008a:25-33; 1996:100-110). However, Scott's internal claim, framed as theological (1980:70), lacks the specificity Dandelion gives his understanding of the 'behavioural creed' as based around the practice of silent worship (1996:100-110). Scott's claim around the Quaker life could relate to the practice of silent worship. However, it is unclear and, as discussed in §1.4.2, 'the Quaker life' may be interpreted as relating to other features such as social values. It is also not clear whether Scott understood her positioning of the Quaker life as separate from a mystical (or 'theistic') understanding of the Quaker religious experience. However, as the move of some nontheists to view Quaker identity as based around practice indicates, this is not how such claims have always been interpreted. Collins' observation that polyvalence of practices makes them unreliable as a stable basis for coherence, since they are open to different interpretations (2002a:151), still relates to unspecified appeals to notions of practice and life: such expression are open to interpretations, both of different foci and varyingly expansive.

Indeed, many of the characterisations of Liberal Quakerism given above are open to a similar line of inquiry. Rock typifies Liberal Quakerism as 'the religion of what is done' (2015) – a characterisation that opens itself to the question: what do Quakers do? This is comparable to the question: how do Liberal Quakers live? Both feed into questions such as: how expansive are the normative expectations on Quaker behaviour, which relate to the maintenance of and ability to legitimately claim a definitive Liberal Quaker identity? Do they involve elements that might relate to more discursive expressions of the Liberal Quaker identity, thereby potentially becoming points of Liberal Quaker 'orthodoxy'? If so, how do such elements get expressed?

On the point of expanded notions of Quaker practice, even the quotation from Dandelion on the NFN UK website seems to expand the concept of Quaker practice beyond what was originally detailed in Dandelion's thesis publication. It does not limit the scope of Liberal Quakerism's identity-defining 'form' of worship, but rather includes mention of Quakerism's '*business method, its testimony and values*' (Dandelion, 2008b:70; 'What is Nontheism?,' 2017). This discrepancy on Dandelion's part may be because the quotation is from his *Very Short Introduction to Quakerism* (2008b) – as the title indicates, a shorter, less in-depth or rigorously academic publication than his doctoral publication. In the latter, Dandelion actually delineates testimonies as split between the Quaker 'double-culture' of a liberal attitude towards belief and a conservative one towards form – behaviour/worship (1996:121-122). They are positioned as collectively upheld as group values on an institutional level, but the adherence to them on a popular level is less uniform (ibid.). They therefore offer valuable insights into how Liberal Quakers may seek to construct a loose

sense of orthodoxy in light of their theological diversity and points of opposing tension along the theism–nontheism divide. During the 2016 think tank, and in *God, Words and Us*, the Quaker theologian Rachel Muers appeals to the Quaker approach to the peace testimony as a potential template for approaching the issue of theism–nontheism. §§4.3.1 and 4.3.2 therefore consider the way in which testimonies operate in the Quaker community, and examines Muers' proposal in the light of Grant's concept of list structures as a route to understanding the feasible ways Quakers may attempt to codify and express their theological diversity (Muers, in: Rowlands, 2017:72).

(4.3.1) Quaker Testimonies: Split Between the Quaker Double-Culture

As initially formulated, Dandelion's behavioural creed took 'Quaker behaviour' to refer specifically to the form of worship Quakers practice during Quaker meetings, during what Dandelion refers to as 'Quaker-time' (1996:101-103): that is to say, the behavioural creed dictates that the form of Quaker practice during meeting is that of silent worship, and it covers the various rules of etiquette governing the manner of breaking silence to give ministry. Dandelion details etiquette as influencing seven aspects concerning the manner in which ministry is given: 'i) length; ii) style; iii) frequency; iv) timing; v) content; vi) thematic association; vii) linguistic construction' (2008a:32). Dandelion explicitly clarifies that his behavioural creed does not refer to values and practices outside of meeting (1996:121-123). Dandelion elaborates this primarily in reference to Quaker testimonies.

A testimony in the Quaker case can be defined as: 'that which the group has to say on … [an issue] the importance of which goes beyond individual concern … Testimonies are adopted collectively … ' (Dandelion, 1996:121). Testimonies primarily concern the way Quakers relate to and engage with the world and may, therefore, be seen to fall under what is considered Quaker practice (ibid.). Many early testimonies, for example those concerning endogamy, 'plaining' and the (non-)observation of festivals acted primarily to define Quakers as separate from the wider society. However, many of these have now broken down (ibid.). Currently recognised testimonies for British Liberal Quakers include the testimonies to peace, equality, truth and integrity, simplicity and sustainability ('Quakers in Britain,' n.d.). Quakers now will often relate all of these to working for global and social justice. On the 'Quakers in Britain' website the testimony for peace is related to peace activism; equality to fighting injustice through campaigning for, e.g., 'marriage equality'; truth and integrity to political engagement and 'speaking truth to [people in] power'; simplicity and sustainability to ecological concerns (ibid.). From this one may say that it appears this is part of what Quakers uphold collectively; this is part of what Quakers do; this is part of what gives Liberal Quakers a sense of coherent identity; concomitantly it offers Quakers discursive resources from which to construct notions of neo-orthodoxy.

Dandelion, however, challenges the extent to which testimonies act as an effective boundary function for Liberal Quakers, or can act as a potential source of stable orthodoxy. As mentioned, he advocates the view that the manner in which Quakers engage with testimonies is 'split' between their 'liberal belief culture' and their more conservative approach towards form (1996:121-122). He notes that the testimonies are collectively upheld as part of Quaker tradition, i.e. as part of the behavioural creed (ibid.). However,

when it comes to the interpretation and adherence of members on an individual level, he contends that there is a large amount of variation, and that testimonies are engaged with permissively and in accordance with the 'liberal belief culture' (ibid.). He relates this primarily to the peace testimony, noting that in Heron's study of attenders in 1992 only 60.2% of respondents said they would consider themselves pacifists, and only 44% of 'those who had participated in the group for less than three years' (Heron 1992 cited in: ibid.). This again parallels Collins' note of caution regarding the behaviour as polyvalent: that its appearance of uniformity may be deceiving (Collins, 2002a:151). Dandelion's point is that, while testimonies may outwardly present a 'pattern' (form) 'of group adherence', the way in they are individually interpreted showcases far more open diffuseness than that presented by Liberal Quakers around the form of worship during meeting.

Developments since Dandelion's thesis research add credence to his characterisation of the way Quakers approach testimonies, particularly with regard to pacifism and the peace testimony. The 2013 British Quaker Survey found that a sizable minority of Quakers felt that violence could be justified under some circumstances (Hampton, 2014:29). Furthermore, the likelihood of Quakers' seeing violence as occasionally permissible varied depending on their level of commitment to traditional Quaker Christian beliefs and/or 'theist' type beliefs – 8% for traditional (Christian) Quakers, 10% for post-Christian but not nontheist type Quakers, and 21% for nontheists (ibid.) – adding credibility to the claim that Liberal Quakers showcase variation in their individual adherence to testimonies, and that this variation is linked to their diversifying liberal belief culture.

Additionally, following the think tank on the issue of theism–nontheism, Rachel Muers sent out an email noting that '[t]here are Quakers who aren't pacifists' (Muers, in: Rowlands, 2017:72; also in Boulton, 2016:60). She elaborates that the contributions of these non-pacifist Quakers in Quaker discussion are generally held to be 'a good thing and enriched Quaker thinking' (ibid.). She goes on to say:

> my assumption is that non-pacifist Friends wouldn't expect their personal convictions to be expressed in collective Quaker statements and actions but they'd probably expect to see them reflected somewhere as the 'minority report' in a collection like *QF&P*. (ibid.)

This adds credence to the notion that Quaker commitment to the testimonies is loose, but also to the notion that testimonies are somewhat split between the 'double-culture'.

(4.3.2) Group Recognition of Testimonies: Analogous Routes Towards Theist–Nontheist Reconciliation

Significantly, Muers advocates that the structure of Quaker responses to non-pacifists may also helpfully be applied to resolving the issue of nontheism (ibid.). Given that Quaker orthopraxy also has the potential of breaking down, especially with the growth of nontheism among Friends (Hampton, 2014:43), an examination of how Quakers understand and negotiate their approach towards testimonies provides a good testing ground for understanding how Quakers are more broadly negotiating their coherent identity, along with how this might feed into constructions of neo-orthodoxy. As Dandelion says at the end of his doctoral work:

> The place of testimonies and their use within the Quaker double-culture could be examined more closely, to further explore the religious status of the testimonies and the changing nature of the Quaker double-culture. (1996:327)

Muers' suggestion indicates one way Quakers may move to resolving conflicts among Quakers, by separating Quaker positions out into a broadly 'orthodox' position, which is upheld collectively and outwardly informs group action, and a 'minority report' which is still recognised in texts such as *QF&P*.

The type of move suggested by Muers may be illuminated with reference to Grant's concept, drawn from Lindbeck, of Quakers operating grammatical-type rules around the 'making of list-format remarks' (2014:45). Grant states that there are: ' … some underlying rules, or at least guidelines, which Friends follow when they engage in this list-making language-game, even if they themselves would deny that' (2014:129). Under this framing Muers could be taken as suggesting an additional 'grammatical' rule concerning how Quakers perform the practice of list-making, especially in quasi-authoritative texts such as *QF&P*: that is, a rule of adding a 'minority report' to represent those Liberal Quakers who hold views that cannot easily be synthesised with those held by the majority. Here we can see an extended notion of the types of practices Quakers engage in communally: namely, they also engage in a practice of list-making following certain implicit rules.

(4.3.3) Underlying Theological Implications to Grant's List Structures

Given this thesis' interest in exploring Quaker construction of neo-orthodoxies and/or new orthodoxy, Grant's work on Quaker language use and her claim that Quakers engage in a

rule-governed practice of constructing list remarks when making expressions of belief is worth considering in more detail. As intimated, Grant's concept of Quakers constructing list-format remarks following communal grammatical-type rules can be understood as an extended form of Quaker practice – a view which may illuminate how Quakers may codify and make expressions of a 'common' Quaker identity on a more linguistic and/or discursive level. However, Grant may be seen to go further than this as she says: 'The very act of creating the list with the narrative claim that it implies does itself make a theəlogical[60] statement' (2014:164). This is significant as it indicates that Quaker expressions of belief following a communal-type grammatical structure do have theological underpinnings. These demarcate the type of beliefs that may be expressed within the Liberal Quaker group. If these underpinnings are internally recognised, they may plausibly be upheld as a form of Quaker 'orthodoxy'.

Previously, this thesis has noted that Grant's work contains suggestions that universalist assumptions may underlie the logic/grammar of Quaker list format remarks(2014:178). The universalist Quaker assumption that the common religious experience cannot be adequately expressed in language (2014:255) can be tied to the implied claim of list-format remarks identified by Grant. She inferred that the different expressions of belief within these list remarks are in some way 'equivalent' (2014:146). However, as discussed in the previous chapter, Boulton–Cupitt nontheism seems to challenge the assumption that Quaker

[60] 'Thealogy is a term widely used by feminist thealogians to denote theology done with an awareness of the divine feminine. In order to capture these ideas succinctly I use the vowel schwa, written ə and pronounced 'uh'; in English, this sound when used alone represents hesitation and doubt. By embedding ə in the centre of the word theology (thealogy, atheology) to make theəlogy I avoid statements about people's beliefs about God's gender and existence while acknowledging that these beliefs are both varied and significant.' (Grant, 2014:14). Given that this thesis' focus is on the issue of nontheism rather than God's gender, the thesis has primarily used the term '(a)theological' with the exception of the present engagement with Grant.

expressions of belief relate to a common religious experience. Nevertheless, Grant posits that expressions of Boulton–Cupitt nontheistic beliefs can reasonably be incorporated within Liberal Quaker list-structured remarks. In her treatment of Cupitt's (a)theological/philosophical position she concludes that 'non-realism is compatible with pluralism' (2014:180-81). Here, Grant's use of the term 'pluralism' rather than 'universalism' is telling. Whilst closely tying the typical Quaker understanding of pluralism to a Quaker universalist position (2014:154), elsewhere she seems to note that one governing rule behind Quaker expressions of belief may relate to a broader understanding of 'theəlogical' pluralism. In her conclusion she claims that 'Quaker pluralism is not, however, necessarily … monocentric[61] pluralism' (2014:266), before going on to state explicitly that Quaker pluralism 'is compatible with a non-theist position both in that not believing in any deity can be encompassed within the pluralist view as a legitimate path, and in that nontheists can hold pluralist views themselves' (ibid.). Grant's claim concerning the compatibility of Cupittian-type views with Quaker pluralism seems to rest on the idea that such views would hold expressions of religion that aid human flourishing to be acceptable and/or valuable (2014:170).

The significant point is that, once the possibility has been granted that the 'theəlogical' pluralism that underpins Quaker list remarks may itself be permissibly heterogenous, the underlying rules and/or 'theəlogical' statement of the list appear to diverge from the universalist assumptions around a common religious experience. It moves closer to Dandelion 'absolute perhaps'. Indeed, Dandelion has said that he views Grant's formulation

[61] 'Monocentric pluralisms understand there to be one ultimate reality to which all religions are, in their different ways, responding, as opposed to a polycentric pluralism which would argue that two religious traditions are responding to two different realities.' (Grant, 2014:152)

of list structures as a manifestation of the 'absolute perhaps' (personal communication, supervision discussions). There is support for this as Grant advocates that Quaker list remarks are also informed by a desire to be 'inclusive' (2014:255-56). This refers to the discussions in the previous chapter concerning the question of the exact scope of the 'absolute perhaps': does it entail a broad tolerance that extends beyond assumptions around a common religious experience? If so, does it seek to incorporate those positions that are not themselves 'perhaps-y' or tolerant; or is the minimum requirement that permissible positions in themselves allow for such tolerance and pluralism?

Grant seems to entertain both possibilities, claiming that the Liberal Quaker 'reaction' to theological diversity 'seems to me to be a pluralist one, even when it is applied to distinctly anti-pluralist positions.' (2014:266). However, in the subsequent paragraph she indicates that nontheist positions may be accommodated within Liberal Quakerism on the basis that they are likely to hold that other traditions contain 'an element of truth':

> … the Quaker non-theist literature is presently relatively small (in part because of its relative youth), but it would be consistent with other Quaker perspectives and with the behaviour of Quaker non-theists to hold that many traditions contain an element of truth, and that non-theism can be seen as another tradition to which the same applies. (ibid.)

The criteria via which Boulton–Cupitt nontheists may say that other traditions contain 'an element of truth', however, is markedly different from the criteria employed by Quaker universalists. They accept that such views may be positively tolerated in that they seem in some cases to valuably promote flourishing. However, as discussed previously, their view of the metaphysics of religious experiences seems to directly contradict the typical universalist

Quaker view. If such a position is sufficient to be framed as pluralist and tolerant towards the diverse expressions of 'truths' within the Liberal Quaker community, it may be asked what kind of 'truth' Quakers are pursuing as a group. It seems that this broader tolerance places Quakers in a position where their common 'truth' is understood more in terms of pursuing social and/or political goods, rather than one which relates to an engagement with a universalist religious experience. Plausibly, this may be related to values found in Quaker testimonies. However, as previously indicated, these testimonies themselves are not unanimously adhered to. Furthermore, the move Quakers are now making, to note, listen to and respect differences rather than identifying each other as expressing the same phenomena/enterprise in various ways,[62] seems to raise a question over whether various Quaker views are mutually tolerant of each other even when the directly contradict each other.

Grant's academic formulation around Quaker list-format remarks lends some useful insights into how Quakers may seek to structure expressions of their diverse beliefs. It may also be seen as appealing to Boulton–Cupitt nontheists, since the focus on cultural-linguistic structural aspects as typifying the Liberal Quaker identity fits with their own view of religion. However, it seems that the current move of the Quaker group towards more explicitly expressing and/or engaging with the issue Quaker nontheism may put pressure on the extent to which list-format remarks may be related to any definitive 'theəlogical' statements. This is aggravated by the fact that, whilst appealing to such cultural-linguistic structures in their understanding of religion, Boulton–Cupitt nontheists do not seem to

[62] See §3.5.

agree that such cultural-linguistic structures and/or resources need to be commonly conserved, but may rather be freely and playfully engaged with by individuals.

Given that the structural dynamics and make-up of Liberal Quakerism is seemingly increasingly becoming more fluid, leading to difficulties in pinning down underlying theəlogical statements, it is useful to consider again Collins' formulation of the dynamics of Liberal discursive negotiation. It has similarities to Grant's thinking in that it places Quakers as constructing a common sense of 'genre' (2002b:292) – comparable to Grant's notions of grammatical rules and fluency. However, Collins places it as emerging from more strategic considerations concerning how to negotiate within the Quaker discursive landscape, rather than codifiable underlying rules. It may therefore be taken to better represent the group's fluidity, and thereby illuminates both the manner in which Boulton–Cupitt nontheists may be positioning themselves within the Quaker discursive landscape, and how Quakers may internally formulate a reflexive response to this issue – matters that will be explored in §4.3.5 and §4.3.6 respectively.

(4.3.4) Narratives, Discourses and Cultural Resources

To reiterate some of the material covered in §2.5.1, Collins draws on Mikhail Bakhtin in understanding the sense of Quaker identity to be continually constructed and reconstructed via a negotiation between narratives and levels of discourse. In his own analysis he identifies three different levels of Quaker discourse that interact and are divergently drawn upon by individual Quakers in their constructions of the individual Quaker identities: prototypical, vernacular and canonical (2002b:290).

His positioning of canonical discourses[63] seems to tally closely with Dandelion's remarks around testimonies. Dandelion identifies markers which Quakers can ostensibly unite behind, but posits that the way in which Quakers interpret or engage with these markers on an individual level is slippery and non-uniform. The shifting and diversifying picture Collins presents of Quaker discourses and interpretation fits well with Dandelion's concept of the Quakers operating a 'prescription of seeking' and/or the 'absolute perhaps' (2008a:33). The engagement in a shifting and changing process of constructing identity could be said to have become the new orthodoxy. However, even if Collins' delineation is taken as a manifestation of the 'absolute perhaps', it must be said that he gives a thickened and more detailed explication of the dynamics involved.

One aspect Collins underlines is that the dynamics involved in the construction of Quaker identity are more complicated, with individuals being able to engage in a complete free play while constructing their particular sense of Quaker identity. Whilst these narratives and discursive constructions may be unstable, they are not completely disconnected. Collins notes that narratives and discourses are 'communal products'; they are 'co-authored' by individuals within the group. Therefore, while individuals may engage in this process in idiosyncratic ways, to an extent they do have to respond to and 'reflect' one another (2002a:152, 2002b:291,293). Again as influenced by Bakhtin, Collins suggests that, while Quakers may not develop a fully stable construction of their identity, the three levels of Quaker discourse combine to lend some '*relatively stable types*' allowing Quakerism to be

[63] Discussed in more detail in §2.5.1.

understood as a certain genre (Collins, 2002b:292). To restate one of the quotes Collins takes from Bakhtin (already given in §2.5.1):

> Genres must be fully mastered in order to be manipulated freely … The better our command of genres the more freely we employ them, the more fully and clearly we reveal our own individuality in them … the more perfectly we implement our free speech plan. (Bakhtin, 1986:80, cited in: Collins, 2002b:292)

Collins' delineation, however, frames knowledge and/or mastery of Quaker discourses as primarily allowing for greater 'manipulation' and greater expression of one's own individuality (2002b:292). His portrayal of Quakerism understood as genre suggests that the tropes found within the Quaker discourses are points to which Quakers refer and which they deploy somewhat strategically in the construction of their individual identity within the group. The sources he points to as 'canonical' are not framed as lending underpinnings or foundations which bracket and unite Liberal Quakers, but rather as lending common resources which individual Quakers can use to construct their own identity. Indeed, Collins details how these discourses can ' … be adopted or co-opted both by those who wish to sustain the traditional and by those radicals who wish to overturn the status quo' (2002b:289). For Collins, having 'a feel for the game' or genre seems to involve having a strategic aptitude and knowing how to signal that one is engaging in Quaker discursive landscape rather than relating to the rules which entail theological implications as Grant has suggested.

It may be helpful to draw a parallel between Collins's work and the sociological academic work of Zachary Dutton on Liberal Quakers, where Dutton identifies the Quaker history of nonviolence (linked to the peace testimony) as a 'culture resource' for Quakers. He further posits that Quakerism itself could be understood as a comprehensive cultural resource

comprising ‘a collection of associated cultural resources’ (2013:112). Dutton defines cultural resources as ‘a linguistically constituted notion used in turn to constitute existential meaning’ and emphasises that ‘subjects use cultural resources understood as “loose“ toolkits or “loose“ frames’ (2013:96-7). Dutton then, like Collins, suggests that these cultural resources do not offer Liberal Quakers a basis for clear unity and coherence.

Notably, Dutton also argues that while certain ‘cultural resources’ may not be subscribed to by certain individuals, these resources can still have an influence on their worldview. Drawing on the interviews he conducted with Liberal Quakers in Boston, he notes that ‘nonviolence still influences subjects who do not explicitly call themselves pacifists’ (2013:111), detailing how two of his interviewees did not express a complete commitment towards nonviolence but still recognised it in some form, one even expressing that it was a ‘ … fundamental part of the Religious Society of Friends’ (2013:104). Concerning the British Quaker context, this tallies with Dandelion’s characterisation of the way testimonies are engaged with, along with Muers’ allusion to a possible ‘minority report’ (in Rowlands, 2017:72). However, Dutton also notes how these interviewees with a weaker commitment to nonviolence would perform or convey their Quaker identity (or ‘social position’) by referencing and/or highlighting other ‘cultural resources’ within the Quaker community. For example, respondents with weaker commitments to nonviolence emphasised aspects like ‘spirituality’ and/or ‘the Quaker community’ (2013:105,107-108,110). This tracks somewhat with Collins’ formulation concerning how Quaker subjects construct their identities drawing differently on various different resources and discourses. These insights from both Collins and Dutton are useful in making sense of the ways in which nontheism is being positioned

within British Liberal Quakerism, and developments around the theism–nontheism issue more generally.

(4.3.5) Nontheists Negotiating Within the Liberal Quaker 'Genre'

Similar to Grant's formulation around Quaker expressions of belief being informed by certain grammatical-type rules, Collins' and Dutton's treatments of the Liberal Quaker identity may be internally appealing to Boulton–Cupitt nontheists. They may, again, seem to fit with the reflexive internal claim made by Boulton–Cupitt nontheists that religion is socio-linguistically constructed, along with the subsequent claim that they can legitimately draw upon various narrative and cultural resources in constructing their individual religious identity. However, Collins adds a cautionary note here: he suggests that the communal nature of Quaker dialogical/discursive negotiation means that, whilst the development of Quaker identity is flexible, one still has to make signals that one's prototypical discourse is engaging with different levels of the Quaker discourse, thereby validating one's Quaker identity as authentic (2002b:292). From a more external standpoint, this formulation can be seen to make sense out of the manoeuvring of nontheists as they negotiate their position within the Liberal Quaker genre.

In aligning themselves with orthopraxy, a concern for individual experience and a temperament for seeking (or the 'absolute perhaps'), nontheists can be seen as (somewhat strategically) locating themselves within Quaker discourses or the 'genre' of Liberal Quakerism. They are showcasing 'a feel for the game' of Liberal Quakerism. Here academic sociological works (e.g. Dandelion's) may be seen to have reflexively become part of the

internal Quaker discourse: in Dutton's terms, 'cultural resources' that are being used by nontheists (among other Quakers) to construct and validate their sense of Quaker identity. Dutton's observation that those with a weaker commitment to one aspect or 'cultural resource' within Quakerism may emphasise another aspect as a key component to Quaker identity is also illuminating to the presentation of nontheism within Quakerism. Nontheists of the broadly Boulton–Cupitt type show less of a commitment to the typical Quaker understanding of the religious experience as a phenomenon stemming from a common 'divine' source, but they compensate for this by signalling towards and emphasising other aspects and associated 'cultural resources' that both play a part in and (in their view) validate their Quaker identity.

One way in which nontheists can be seen to do this is by aligning themselves with the testimonies (particularly the peace testimony). In the popular literature, Boulton proclaims an affinity for Quaker values, testimony and social engagement. The quotation from Dandelion given on the nontheist website[64] includes mention of '*testimony and values*' without an indication that Dandelion holds testimony and values to be less uniform and stable defining features of the Quaker identity than the practice of silent worship. Admittedly, the authors of the website may be unaware of this level of nuance based on the fact they cite Dandelions less academic publication *A Very Short Introduction to Quakerism* (Dandelion, 2008b:70; 'What is Nontheism?,' 2017) rather than for examples his doctoral thesis. However, elsewhere Boulton has gone further in affirming the centrality of testimonies as a definitive feature of the Liberal Quaker identity. In the front piece to *Godless For God's Sake* Boulton directly states: 'The Society is defined by its values and

[64] See §4.1.

"testimonies" rather than by dogma' (2006:2), with the references to the method of worship, that appear on the website, being dropped.

The extent to which nontheists show a greater commitment than non-nontheists to Quaker testimonies is, however, open to question. The 2013 British Quaker Survey, as mentioned, found that those with less of a commitment to a belief in God were in fact more likely to see violence as occasionally permissible (Hampton, 2014:29). Furthermore, in response to Muers' comments relating non-pacifists to nontheists, Boulton approves of this approach to non-pacifism within the Religious Society of Friends (2016:61). He does not push the point that, whilst theism may be questioned, it is important that Quakers remain committed to the 'peace testimony' in the sense of being pacifist. This suggests that whilst the nontheist literature may signal a commitment to Quaker practice in terms of testimony and values, the actual level of commitment expected by nontheists towards these aspects of Quakerism is also varied and loose.

In line with Dutton's framework of Quaker social positioning around culture resources (2013:110), it is interesting to posit whether, as Liberal Quakers move to explicitly recognise and accept that the requirement for Quakers to commit to a 'theistic' belief is loosening, there will be a movement to emphasise other key aspects of the Quaker identity, such as nonviolence. Indeed, in examples drawn from Quaker sources in the next section and the next chapter, the thesis seeks to demonstrate that initial indications of this kind of development are already apparent.

Boulton notes, however, that there may be a 'variety of understandings of what pacifism means' (2016:61; also in: Rowlands 2017:72). It may be more charitable to say that nontheists such as Boulton are not necessarily signalling a commitment to testimony which they do not follow, but rather, as Dandelion and Collins both suggest, they interpret the manner in which testimonies may be adhered to in a variety of ways. They may, for example, have an understanding of peaceful living that does not necessitate a strict commitment to nonviolence. Dutton notes this type of approach in the worldview of one of his interviewees who says: ' … peace resembles the way Quakers do business. It de-emphasizes the self, makes space for listening to others, and emphasizes connection … ' (2013:108). This displays an internal recognition that various Quaker discourses and 'cultural resources' may not only be emphasised and deployed in differing degrees, but are in themselves open to a variety of interpretations. This indicates that, despite there being discursive elements informing the construction of Quaker identity, the way Quakers interact with what may be termed the Quaker 'genre' still seems to fall in line with an attitude of 'absolute perhaps' (Dandelion. 2008a:33-36).

What Collins and Dutton can be seen to add to this is that the manner in which the 'absolute perhaps' is manifest does not entail an immediate and complete removal from other established elements of Quaker milieu. Rather, their formulations suggest that the 'absolute perhaps' entails individuals' picking from different elements of this milieu along with, potentially, mixing elements drawn from 'non-Quaker religious or quasi-religious' systems (Pilgrim, 2008:63). They arrange them in way that may be highly idiosyncratic but still contains points that signal that they belong within the Quaker milieu – a process that may be considered as a style of 'bricolage'. However, even if these potential (commonly

accessible) resources for signalling a Liberal Quaker identity are adopted, emphasised, interpreted and mixed with non-Quaker systems in a variety of ways by Quaker individuals and subgroups, it seems unlikely that these common resources can lend Quakers a unified narrative or sense of orthodoxy.

(4.3.6) Liberal Quaker Reflexive and Internal Recognition of Historio-Cultural-Linguistic Structures

Recent popular outputs from within the Quaker group show indications of ideas of extended notions of Quaker practice and group structures (i.e. ones that incorporate discursive elements) that are similar to those referred to above and are being presented as possible routes for internally formulating a common sense of Liberal Quaker identity. In other words, much as reflexive appeals are being made to orthopraxy as a basis for Liberal Quaker coherence, they are also being made to broader notions of Quaker cultural-linguistic structures.

Again, these appeals may seem to validate Boulton–Cupitt nontheists, who see this as a legitimate approach to religion. However, the views diverge from the Boulton–Cupitt line in that they are developing specifically in response to the challenge of Quaker diversity and the issue of theism–nontheism. Therefore, the reason they internally present such a model may be partly that the model may act to give Liberal Quakers a shared sense of identity, rather than simply the individualised therapeutic and/or aesthetic reasons foregrounded by Cupitt and Boulton (Cupitt, 1985:266). Accordingly, they tend to maintain and/or emphasise that some communal agreement on these cultural-linguistic structures can and/or should be

conserved. This aligns with Lindbeck's conservative positioning of a 'cultural-linguistic' theological model rather than Cupitt's more 'liberal' or indeed 'hyper-liberal' or individualistic, postmodern approach.[65] Indeed, as will be seen in the examples examined, two of the commentators who have promoted such a view within the Quaker discursive landscape directly reference (i.e. reflexively employ) Lindbeck and postliberalism. There is however, disagreement amongst those who suggest such a more expansive and discursive reflexive-structural response concerning the consequent rigidity and/or stability of said structures.

In relation to the question of religious experience and universalist and/or 'theistic' beliefs, much like appeals to orthopraxy, these more expansive and discursive reflxive-structural responses seem to marginalise that question as it relates to the common Liberal Quaker identity. However, in doing so the individuals advocating such responses may be seen as more 'perhaps-y' on the question of religious experience than Boulton–Cupitt nontheists (Dandelion, 2008b:110), who on the face of it present a similar reflexive-structural understanding of religion. This greater 'perhapness' is one of the factors that position such responses as seeking to resolve the divisions in the Quaker theological culture. Whilst in some ways structurally similar to the appeals to orthopraxy in expanding notions of Quaker practice to include discursive and narrative elements, such responses provide possible resources that Quakers may utilise in discursively/linguistically expressing and marking out a loose sense of a new Liberal Quaker orthodoxy. Contrary to Grant, however, they do not tend to link their concepts of a common Quaker structure to underlying theological statements. Instead, they commonly relate their vision for a shared Quaker structure and/or

[65] Discussed in the previous chapter, see §3.2.

narrative to features like communal participation, a broadly expressed idea of history and tradition, and (fitting in with the previous work of this chapter) commitments to testimonies and values, such as peace.

The present section considers how features seemingly exhibited by these responses – namely, a shift away from a focus on religious experience and the claim that such traditional structures can and should be stably maintained – may be put under tension by adverse attitudes found in the broader Liberal Quaker community. These kinds of concerns may be seen to feed into the development of alternative responses, namely the 'alteristic responses' covered in the next chapter.

Collins both recognises and showcases an affinity for internal reflexive moves of the kind this section is attempting to demarcate. As mentioned (§2.5), he has related that his Bakhtinian analysis of Liberal Quaker discourse appeals to him as 'both the anthropologist and the Quaker' (2002b:295), along with the suggestion that such a process combined with the interweaving of non-Quaker narratives may revitalise the Quaker group:

> Meeting narratives have always been, at least to some extent, interwoven with those threads spun in the context of wider society. Writing both as social scientist and Quaker, I believe it is this process which, if sustained, may yet revitalize what remains of an extraordinary group. (2008:52)

Similarly, the American 'convergent' Quaker C. Wess Daniels suggests an internal model of renewal whereby Liberal Quakers can respond to their potential fragmentation and/or dissolution by attending to both their tradition and the wider context of contemporary society (2015a:7-20). Drawing on the work of Henry Jenkins, taking inspiration from the

participatory culture of fan culture – e.g. fan-fiction and hip-hop sampling (2015a:100) – Daniels suggests that Quakers can similarly participate in their culture, revitalising it by either poaching from and/or remixing (restructuring) various cultural resources:

> … through a process that … remixes the original texts of the tradition with new texts and interpretations … structured as an open work where many voices can participate, power is shared and the work is open ended and expandable … they will … create a renewed participatory community that is both rooted in their tradition and in their contemporary context and done in a way that draws on the contributions of all those within the community. (2015a:210)

Both Collins and Daniels are advocating that a bricolage-type approach of drawing from different discourses and creatively remixing them may be a positive internal approach to Quakerism. Quakerism holistically becomes about this continual process of negotiation and reconstruction. However, Collins and Daniels differ from the Boulton–Cupitt model in that they emphasise that this process is not solely individual, but also a communal negotiation drawing upon the dialogical input or 'contributions of all those with the community' (Daniels 2015a:210). As previously indicated (§2.5.1), Collins does not hold that this process ends in an insular stability or 'Hegelian unity', and comparably Daniels characterises the work as 'open ended'. Daniels also gives limits to this open-endedness: he says that it is 'rooted' in history and tradition, drawing upon Alasdair McIntyre's understanding of tradition as historically extended arguments that are socially embodied with community' and Stephen 'Bevan's understanding that mission is always embedded within the church's context' (2015a:250). This may be seen as similar to the place Collins gives to the canonical and vernacular levels of discourse. However, when Daniels suggests this internal model, such a move prompts further questions, including how much individual contributors are permitted to diverge from the historical traditions of the group, and how individuals are supposed to

signify and/or maintain a respect for such traditions. This is complicated further by the point that 'seeking' and 'openness' have themselves seemingly become key features of the communal Quaker milieu. Consequently, such appeals to communal values and traditions as a basis for shared identity are still liable to feed back and disrupt themselves.

In a two-part blog post entitled 'Boulton, Lindbeck and Rorty: Imagining a Quakerism Without Metaphysics' (2016a, 2016b), the Quaker theologian Ben Wood explicitly advocates a need to go beyond orthopraxy as a basis for Quaker coherence: ' … a simple Quaker orthopraxy is not enough. We need a narrative as well as a practice to keep our communities going' (2016b). As indicated by the title, Wood frames this specifically as a potential line of response to the issue of Quaker diversity and Boulton's nontheism, and explicitly draws on Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic theological model, saying that:

> We discern the right way forward, not because we have hampered out some account of God's existence (or non-existence) but because [we] are able to make the link between our stories, our words and our concrete practice … this cultural-linguistic approach to present tensions among Quakers is far from perfect, it has the potential to build bridges between different kinds of Friends … Friends might be encouraged to dig down into our native Quaker tongue and find renewed riches in our shared particularities. Once unshackled from barren discussions of theism or non-theism, we can again unite under the canopy of shared Quaker speech and practice. (ibid.)

Wood deviates from Daniels in emphasising the possibility of Quakers' uniting under these shared traditions and narratives rather than emphasising the open-endedness of communal Quaker constructions. In suggesting what these Quaker narratives and shared stories might be comprised of, Wood can be seen to make suggestive gestures towards typical Quaker values and/or testimonies. ' … [H]ow do we know,' he asks, 'when we are speaking and

acting coherently as Quakers? We know because our speech and consequent action are consistent with our story of “peace”, “truth” and “love”.’(ibid.) Tellingly, he posts this image under the heading ‘Do We Dare to Share?’ (ibid.)

(ibid.)

This fits with the lines of discussion above concerning whether or not aspects of the Quaker cultural milieu, such as the commitment to peace, may be emphasised to compensate for the diminishing levels of commitment to a divine view of religious experience. In this particular blogpost Wood does not work out the exact details of the cultural-linguistic framework he suggests, but the post is indicative that such ideas are emerging internally within the Liberal Quaker discursive landscape.

The emergence of such ideas within the Quaker discursive landscape is also indicated in Quaker blogger Mark Russ’ post: ‘“I’m religious, not spiritual”: Postliberalism for Quakers’ (2017). Whilst not making specific reference to nontheism, Russ does frame postliberalism

as a shift away from the claims around the universality of religious experience, saying: 'Quite simply, it is impossible to prove that there is a universal religious experience that all people share across all religious traditions' (ibid.). This is a sentiment with which Boulton–Cupitt nontheists would have affinity. Russ elaborates:

> Sometimes I come across the idea that Quakerism itself heralds a 'universal' religion – what I'd call **Quaker exceptionalism** … A postliberal approach provides a check on Quaker exceptionalism, and draws our attention to the **specificity of the Quaker tradition**. Quaker worship is not a blank canvas or empty container, but a form of worship that shapes the experience we have within it. Becoming a Quaker involves learning to 'speak Quaker', which in turn involves learning the tradition and its stories. From a postliberal perspective, attempts to make Quakerism more 'universal' – such as weeding out specific Quaker language or placing copies of the 'World Religions Bible' on meeting house tables – are misguided. A robust and vital Quakerism is one that has a healthy relationship with its own tradition, and does not seek to cast it off. (ibid., emphasises original)

Again, whilst not specifically framed as a resolution to the theism–nontheism debate, Russ' engagement with postliberal theology also suggests that Quakers should shift their sense of common identity away from a primary focus on a universal religious experience and towards a focus, not just orthopraxy, but also on more expanded notions of practices involving discursive, linguistic and traditional elements. Notably, Russ' characterisation of 'Quaker exceptionalism' seems to suggests that there may be something ethically questionable about the universalist and potentially subsuming assumptions Quakers often make about different expressions of religion, fitting with the development discussed above in §3.5 and some of the work of the next chapter.

Regarding Wood's comments concerning any divine, supernatural or theistic origins to religious experience, he may be seen to differ from the non-realist Boulton–Cupitt line and from Lindbeck's original line. Rather than placing experience as secondary to and indeed constructed by cultural-linguistic structures, Wood suggests remaining open on the question of the origins of religious experience. However, he avoids it as a basis for a common Quaker identity, focusing instead on a shared story, as demonstrated by the quotes below:

> David [Boulton] … knows what he rejects, something called 'supernaturalism'. But, since I'm not entirely sure what the 'real' or the 'natural' real involve, I'm willing to concede a lot more.' (2016a)
>
> If we try to go beyond our own story to some transcendent *essence* (an impossible feat) we will tire ourselves out in a pretty pointless task. We would do better if we directed our attention to the practical business of being and acting Quaker. (2016b)

However, this shift away from a focus on religious experience whilst maintaining that Liberal Quakers can still present discursive expressions of their identity and/or theology in the form of shared stories or traditions is still liable to cause tensions. Five out of the six commentators to Mark Russ' blogpost specifically query his marginalisation of a universalist view of religiosity and/or religious experience. In response to this he softens the position implied by his characterisation of postliberalism, clarifying with comments like:

> I think I may have been rash in saying I'm skeptical to all claims of universality … If I'm going to make any claims of universality, I believe that God's saving work is universal (both in that it's universally available and includes everyone and everything), but I'm wary of making statements about human religious practice or experience in terms of universality.
>
> I think the idea that 'all religions are the same' stems from a noble sentiment, but is a cheap and unsuccessful way to true peace.' (2017)

It is notable here that Russ's response involves suggestions of how a different type of universality (as opposed to a common personal experience) may be grounded – suggestions that include 'God's saving work' and 'true peace'. The latter accords with the earlier suggestion that at least rhetoric around peace may be inflated as an identity-compensating response to the group's plural, permissive and fragmentary belief culture currently being expressed in terms of theism–nontheism. Both these suggestions have parallels with the responses, discussed in Chapter 5, revolving around an alteristic ethic of openness – developments which, as seen via a comparison with aspects of Bakhtinian and Derridean thought, offer points of synergy with dispositions towards an open eschatology and nonviolence. Russ' appeal to sentiments of this type is suggestive of the attraction of such lines of thought given the Liberal Quaker context and the current dynamics of the Liberal Quaker theological culture. It is also indicative of the potential interconnectedness and messiness of the trajectory of developments in thought this thesis is demarcating.

Admittedly, the development of this stream of emerging views is still in its infancy. Specifying the details of what make up the points of shared Liberal Quaker narrative, tradition and/or culture that are important to conserve in order to maintain a common sense of identity and/or the ability to express a distinct Quaker identity or codify it in a 'new orthodoxy' still seems like a difficult if not impossible task. It is a difficulty Quakers internally note, as Russ astutely comments:

> One of the difficulties with applying post-liberal insights to modern British Quakerism is that, for Lindbeck, Frei [etc.] … a turn to tradition means re-engaging with scripture, something that I don't think is possible for British Friends collectively. So this question of what a 'turn to tradition' might look like for British Quakers is an elusive one! (ibid.)

Additionally, Wood proclaims that: ‘Doubtless there will still be some Friends who feel hemmed in by the very idea of some kind of a shared story and language’ (2016b). This demonstrates a recognition of the type of phenomena identified by Dandelion’s ‘absolute perhaps’ and Pilgrim’s heterotopic impulse (§2.1), which may act against a proposal to draw upon and conserve tradition.

However, appeals to return to shared structures which go beyond orthopraxy are also starting to emerge in internal popular Quaker outputs. Such responses could be understood in terms of Dandelion’s process of popular Quaker constructing of candidates for neo-orthodoxy. Whilst plausibly being positioned to resolve the theism–nontheism divide, shifting the focus of Quaker identity and/or theology, at this point such responses do not seem clearly defined enough and/or accommodating or ‘fluid’ enough in this current form to be accepted in that role by the Quaker community. However, this permutation or development is worth noting. Given the anthological format of the *Book of Discipline*, it is likely that gestures towards such notions and a return to tradition will have some representation, even as an option for how to formulate Quaker identity rather than an internally recognised basis for coherence. Indeed, such notions may be fitted into Grant’s list structures and/or the ‘absolute perhaps’.

(4.4) Summary

This chapter has delineated and demonstrated the emergence of reflexive-structural views within Liberal Quakerism as part of and in response to the issue of nontheism and the group’s broader (a)theological diversity. Given that Boulton–Cupitt nontheism may be

understood as being reflexive-structural, the chapter opened with a consideration of how such nontheists justified their Quaker authenticity. The chapter argued that typical responses reflected an internal alignment with Dandelion's sociological formulations, the Quaker religious experience being understood with reference to perpetual seeking, akin to the 'absolute perhaps', and Quaker coherence then being understood on the basis of practice. The chapter demonstrated that in some instances Dandelion's work was being directly reflexively employed in the formulating of this response.

The chapter then showed that appeals to orthopraxy as a basis for Liberal Quaker coherence may be seen more broadly throughout the group, being positioned as a possible source of coherence and solution to the diversity and issue of nontheism within the group. This fed into the question of whether developments of discursive expressions of Quaker identity and/orthodoxy had completely closed down, with the Quaker identity moving to be almost completely understood in terms of orthopraxy, supplemented only with a token notion of 'absolute perhaps'.

The chapter argued that this would equate to an impoverished view of Liberal Quaker dynamics and that the Quaker discursive landscape could in fact be seen to be re-opening. This re-opening was precisely because of the Liberal Quaker propensity to self-reflect and develop idiosyncratic and/or new interpretations. Some of these related to extended notions of what constitute Quaker practice. In assessing the potential for these discursive formulations to construct a sense or points of commonality and/or orthodoxy, the chapter explored the position of testimonies within the Liberal Quaker culture. It also considered some comparable delineations from Grant, Collins and Dutton around Liberal Quaker

community as constructing a sense of identity in relation to grammatical-type rules, genre-based rules and/or cultural resources. The chapter demonstrated that from an external viewpoint these academic formulations were useful in illuminating the manner in which Boulton–Cupitt nontheists were positioning themselves within Liberal Quakerism.

Regarding the emergence of candidate neo-orthodoxies, the chapter showed that, as with Dandelion's sociological formulations, Quakers may be seen to be either explicitly drawing components from or paralleling other academic formulations in the production of internal constructions that imply extended notions of common Quaker practice and/or contain more discursive elements. With parallels to postliberal (ecumenical) theology, such responses advocate that through a self-aware re-engagement with tradition and/or collective endeavours Quakers may uphold and maintain more discursive expressions of a common Quaker identity.

However, the chapter noted that there were some likely problems with these responses as 'candidates for neo-orthodoxy' and/or as resolutions to the issues of nontheism and (a)theological diversity: (1) concepts of Quaker tradition are themselves 'elusive' and thin; (2) a number of Quakers are likely to be uncomfortable and/or diverge from proposed definitive narrative-traditional-cultural structures; and (3) such formulations put little or no emphasis on spirituality or experience as a key aspect of Quaker identity and/or belief.

The next chapter aim to delineate alteristic responses – another observable stream of emerging views within the Liberal Quaker discursive landscape, which attempt to respond to and resolve the issues of Quaker diversity and nontheism in a manner that centralises a

concern for an openness towards diversity and otherness. They also seek to synergise that very concern with a particular view of spirituality/religiosity and/or the religious experience.

Chapter 5
Emerging Quaker Views (2): Alteristic Responses

(5.0) Introduction

This chapter is concerned with demonstrating the emergence of alteristic responses within the Liberal Quaker discursive landscape. The responses are here understood primarily in relation to Bakhtin, Derrida, Levinas and Bauman, as explored above in §2.5.2, and involve an attitude of openness and/or hospitality towards otherness. The chapter indicates that these responses may be seen as manifesting with reference to a set of family-resemblance features such as concerns for relationality, other-directedness, hospitality, nonviolence, vulnerability and an open eschatology. The chapter examines how the dynamics of these alteristic responses may interrelate and how they seek to synergise and resolve points of Liberal Quaker division.

The chapter is sensitive to the possibility of such an alteristic ethic framed as a potential constitutive element of Liberal Quaker religiosity, spirituality and/or the phenomenology of the Liberal Quaker religious experience. It thus allows for the possibility of a re-framing of the Quaker experience as an religio-ethical one, offering a potential route towards breaking down the binary distinction between religious/theistic positions and humanist/nontheistic ones. These responses are susceptible of being understood as a manifestation of Dandelion's 'absolute perhaps'. However, as indicated, if they are understood as a (plausibly reflexive) internalisation of the 'absolute perhaps', this may be seen to entail a shift. This shift amounts to positioning an attitude of 'perhaps' not simply as an epistemological claim,

but as an informing part of Quaker religiosity potentially animating the Quaker religious experience itself.

The chapter demonstrates the emergence of these types of responses via an engagement with previous works in the field of Quaker Studies, which suggest the development of such lines of thought (responses) within Liberal Quakerism. This is alongside an examination of data drawn from internal primary texts that specifically engage with the issue of nontheism, some of which indicate a close relation to the group's institutional structures and the process of revision (Rowlands, 2017; Russ, 2018). The chapter argues that these sources indicate that such (alteristic) responses are emerging within the Liberal discursive landscape and are to an extent being constructed into candidates for neo-orthodoxy. Whether they will achieve the position of 'new orthodoxy' is at the point of writing unclear, indeed unlikely, but it is argued they are likely to have some influence on the new *Book of Discipline*.

(5.1) Previous Scholarship in Quaker Studies: Indications of an Emerging Alteristic Ethic

(5.1.1) A Culture of Contribution Informing a Community of Intimacy/Love

Concerning indications of an alteristic ethic – that is, an ethic of openness towards different and diverging views – being internally positioned as a constitutive element of Quaker worship and the Quaker religious experience, such indications are seen in previous academic observations made around some of the more 'progressive groups' within the

Quaker community, namely Young Quakers and the Experiment with Light Group. Research into Young Quakers and the Experiment with Light Group has been carried out most extensively by Simon Best (2008; 2010) and Helen Meads (2008; 2011) respectively. Both Best and Meads formulate their insights into the culture of these groups in contrast to Dandelion's 'culture of silence', where diversity of theological belief is masked and communal unity thereby maintained (Dandelion 2008a:22; Best, 2008:199; Meads 2011:322). By contrast, Best and Meads contend that the groups in their studies operate a 'culture of contribution' (Best, 2008:198-199; Meads, 2011:318). Owing to the divergent forms of worship/meetings of these groups, members are given more explicit space and encouragement to vocalise their beliefs and theseare openly accepted (Best, 2008:199; Meads, 2008:220). This 'culture of contribution' plays a key role in engendering what Best and Meads call a community of 'intimacy' or of 'love' (Best, 2010, 2008:199; Meads, 2008:220-221, 2011:322).

Notably, Best's and Meads' work suggests that both these groups – at the time of study more marginal – practise a form of worship that disturbs the conservative attitude towards the form of silent worship which Dandelion positions as cohering the Quaker group (2008:25-33, 1996:100-110). However, neither writer suggests that this necessarily entails the fragmentation of these groups in terms of their own sense of identity and/or community. Rather, they seem to suggest that the community is sustained, not in reference to a unity of belief or form of worship, but by the intimacy cultivated by the sub-communities themselves (Best, 2008:213; Meads, 2011:322). A key part of this intimacy seems to be based on an open 'culture of contribution' in spite of differences. This is comparable to the consciousness and/or openness towards otherness or the attitude of

hospitality that Bakhtin and Derrida place as informing an 'ethic of alterity' in discourses and communities that attempt to respect and incorporate diversity.[66]

(5.1.1.1) Best and Young Quakers

However, Best also delineates factors informing the construction of a community of intimacy amongst young Quakers, which may be seen to mark out boundaries rather than an absolute openness towards otherness. He suggests that features such as 'affiliation', being a 'networked community', and 'friendship' inform young Quakers' sense of identity as a community of intimacy distinct from non-Quakers and indeed from adult Quakers (2008:209,211). However, all these features seem reflexive, in that young Quakers sustain a sense of community through being a community. Unlike the internal and external work relating to reflexive-structural responses discussed in the previous chapter, Best's work does not go into much detail on the young Quaker community as constructing common structures of meaning beyond a sense of intimacy.

Where Best does discuss common values amongst young Quakers, he claims that 'boundaries are often framed in terms of prohibiting exclusive behaviour' (2008:202). However, that still seems to place young Quakers in the seemingly paradoxical position of having their communal boundaries defined by a value for non-exclusivity. This may be compared to Dandelion's 'absolute perhaps' or Levinasian–Derridean notions of radical hospitality and openness towards otherness – notions previously placed as a tension point

[66] See §2.5.2.

for the maintenance of communities that value tolerance.[67] Notably here, however, the non-exclusivity is framed as a value rather than an epistemological attitude relating to belief claims.

Despite these potential points of paradox, tension and/or tautology, Best's work does suggest that young Quakers sufficiently maintain a sense of identity as distinct from non-Quakers (2008:211). Linked with the suggestion of young Quakers being a 'networked community', a potential reason for this sense of community may rest on the mere fact that they gather in the same space, attending Quaker events such as retreats and/or summer schools. Best discusses this with reference to the work of Maxine Green, who identified such a 'gathering function' as crucial in understanding the formation of identity amongst Quaker adolescents (Green, 2005:12-13, cited in: Best, 2008:194). Going to these events not and gatherings not only helps young Quakers form bonds and a sense of identity, through their own interactions but also because it marks them out as distinct from young non-Quakers with whom they interact outside of this time and space (Best, 2008:194).

Placing the formation of young Quaker identity in their gathering and meeting in the same geographical space is somewhat analogous to Dandelion's move of positioning Quaker identity as cohering around the behavioural creed, in the sense that, whilst the form of young Quaker meetings may deviate from what Dandelion takes to be a conservative approach, Best still holds that belief is diverse among young Quakers and is marginalised as a basis for common identity. In Best's study of adolescent Quakers, 18% of respondents said they did not believe in God and 40% were unsure, and of the 41% that answered in the

[67] See §2.5.2.3.

affirmative, 27 different descriptions were given, the 'most popular' of which were 'inward light' (50%), 'love' (48%), 'spirit' (40%) and 'a life force' (37%); only 13% described God as a being and 9% as a father figure (2008:200). Moreover, Best contends that young Quakers are on the whole less Christian than their adult counterparts, contending that their sense of neo-orthodoxy had moved from post-Christianity to non-Christianity (2008:201). In response to these pluralising developments, Best makes the similar move of placing belief as marginal to the young Quaker identity, which is instead based on the fact that they meet. He goes further than Dandelion in suggesting that the identity is not sustained with reference to a conservative attitude towards form and 'how' they worship, but the seemingly more vaguely defined concept of 'being' a 'community of intimacy' (2008:211). However, this formulation in terms of 'being' a 'community of intimacy' is open to as much internal self-reflection and engagement concerning what that actually means, as the internal and external formulations around Quaker orthopraxy and living the Quaker life.[68]

The act of self-identifying as religious or Quaker may also mark young Quakers as different. Best quotes one respondent as saying 'it's now looked at as a bad thing if you're religious or have morals' (in 2008:206). However, this is still a superficial, unexamined and fragile point of distinction open to further reflection: what are the points of religiosity and/or morality that facilitate a distinct yet coherent sense of the young Quaker identity? There are indications from Best's respondents that a key component of this feeling of a distinct identity may lie in the extent to which they operate an openness, acceptance or tolerance towards others:

[68] See §4.3.

> They know that there are differences. They want to pick on us because not only are we different but they know we're kind of like accepting and they don't understand (Male 15, from Best, 2008:206)
>
> Quakerism … becomes part of who you are like tolerating other people's beliefs that's not taught to you it's part of who you are (Male 15, field notes from Best 2010:311)

Furthermore, Best suggests that considerations of others, primarily within the community, did seem to inform views of religiosity and spirituality among some of the adolescent Quakers he investigated, as demonstrated in these responses:

> The silence gives an overwhelming feeling of presence of those around you. The appreciation of everyone as an individual is a thought I always begin with (Male, 17)
>
> God is sort of like sharing with everyone else something special (Male, 14)
>
> I put much less [importance] on God and more on good in everyone. (Male, 16). (2008:197,200)

Best explicitly states in the conclusion to his thesis that the community of intimacy has become the content of worship for some young Quakers:

> … only 8.5% of respondents state they worship God in Meeting for Worship … for many adolescents it is a Quaker community that they worship and what adolescents choose is a collective intimacy with each other rather than God (2010:301)

Owing to the fact this community of intimacy is in part informed by a 'culture of contribution' and an open recognition of pluralism, with Best claiming that for that community 'pluralism has become the "ultimate reality"' (2010:300), it seems reasonable to deduce that an openness, consciousness and/or consideration of diversity, alterity and/or

otherness has also become constitutive of this core experience of intimacy for some of these Quakers.

(5.1.1.2) Meads' Work and the Experiment with Light Group as Heterotopian

Meads is more explicit about a recognition of diversity and otherness being informative of the phenomenology of religious experience and the sense of a community of intimacy and/or love and, in her formulations around the Experiment with Light group, as she relates in her thesis conclusion:

> Experimenters' religious experience is made up of several experiences … They are not hidden in a culture of silence, but are spoken and shared in a common understanding. Even though Experimenters' experiences are not the same as each others', together they are a body of experiences, which become their shared and understood experience as they hold each other within a community of love. Their religious experience then becomes an explicit element of Quaker spirituality. (2011:322)

Meads draws on Pilgrim's concept of Quakers' operating a heterotopic impulse in her exploration of the dynamics of the Experimenters group (Meads, 2011:117). Therefore, the work may also be linked to the thought of Foucault, from whom Pilgrim derived her concept. Foucault is often grouped as a post-structuralist alongside Derrida (Belsey, 2002). There are key differences between Derrida's and Foucault's thought, though Foucault does also present a view of discourse and meaning as 'fluid and constantly interacting' (Carrette, 2000:105), and his thought is also potentially useful in illuminating Quaker dynamics. Ultimately, however, the present thesis favours the comparative use of Derrida, as in his later thought he showcases to a greater extent explicit reflections on religio-ethical notions which resonate with developments amongst Quakers. Accordingly, the present section

considers the extent to which this thesis' understanding of alteristic responses can illuminate the phenomena frames by Meads frames in terms of heterotopian concepts.

The concept of heterotopias may be understood as 'spaces of alternate ordering' (Hetherington, 1997:vi) in relation to more conventional orderings of societal(-linguistic) structures surrounding them. In Foucault's *Of Other Spaces*, one of the loose general principles of heterotopias given by Foucault is that they are relational, in that they reveal the illusionary nature of other, outside 'normative' space/spaces (Foucault and Miskowiec, 1986 [1967]:27). Subsequent commentators have further centralised this feature of being alternate and relational, notably Kevin Hetherington (1997), whom Pilgrim and Meads both draw on substantially in their work on Quakers (Meads, 2011:96-102; Pilgrim 2008:54).

Meads' interest in heterotopias as relational alternate spaces is linked to the suggestion in her thesis that her group of study, i.e. the Experiment with Light Group, can say/reveal insights that help to progress and re-invigorate British Liberal Quakerism more broadly. As she says in her conclusion:

> The Experiment's heterotopic site and heterotopian process, by their very existence, hold a mirror up … to show BYM that it is not as it would like to see itself, well held spiritually, trusting and loving, an open and honest peaceable church, but rather lacking leadership … unwilling to address internal conflict and drowning in bureaucracy. The Experiment is a symptom … of disease with the culture of silence, aversion from conflict, bureaucracy and lack of truthfulness, showing the schizophrenia that ails BYM … it needs a remedy, which the Experiment could offer. (2011:333)

This suggestion signifies a potential breakdown in the insider/outsider divide between Meads' role as an academic of Quakerism and as a Quaker herself with a personal

investment in the development of the community. Daniels' suggestion that academics and sociologists may be reflexively offering a way forward for the Quaker group (§2.4.1) seems to be accepted in Meads' work, which then indicates a more alteristic response rather than a reflexive-structural one. Meads' direct suggestion that such developments amongst the Experimenters may suggest a way forward for Liberal Quakerism also adds credence to the present thesis' contention that alteristic responses are emerging as candidates for 'neo-orthodoxy'.

To elucidate the manner in which Meads' work fits in with this thesis' previous exploration of alteristic responses, it is pertinent to explore what the 'alternate ordering' of the Experimenters actually entails and how it relates to and/or juxtaposes with the wider Liberal Quaker community. The normative conventions to which the Experimenters are 'holding a mirror' amount to a tendency to hide diversity and avoid conflict via a 'culture of silence'. The 'alternate ordering' the Experiementers offer in relation to this is one that openly showcases and engages the group's internal diversity and alterity. Meads formulates this internal recognition of alterity as alternate to the wider group as a 'multi-dimensional heterotopia'. However, Meads places this as informing the phenomenological structure-content of the 'religious experience' and 'Quaker spirituality'. This seems to bring her thought closer to the development of Derrida's thought of linking an openness towards otherness to an understanding of religio-ethical experience, which is more explicit than in the work of Foucault.

The contention that the phenomenology of the 'religious' experiences examined and delineated in the work of Meads may be more fruitfully compared to notions of an alteristic

ethic rather than a 'multi-dimensional hetertopia' may be supported by looking at how Meads explicates the experiences of Experimenters in an earlier piece (2008) in relation to exposing vulnerability:

> To share … was risky and exposed their vulnerabilities to others … sharing amplified the experience, not least because they would carry around others' images as well as their own. (2008:219)
>
> To share requires an ability to be both vulnerable and trusting. I observed Experimenters softening towards each other both as they exposed their vulnerability … and as other group members held their Friend's vulnerability (2008:220)

Significantly, Levinas characterises his understanding of ethics as a form of love and as a response to vulnerability: 'Love aims at the Other … in his fragility … Frailty does not here figure the inferior degree of any attribute … the *way* of the tender consists in an extreme fragility, a vulnerability' (1991[1969]:256). Accordingly, Derridean deconstruction with its link to Levinasian ethics has been characterised by subsequent commentators as 'a radical acceptance of vulnerability' (Spivak 1990:18, cited in: Drichel, 2013). Meads' engagement with heterotopia may offer one way of elucidating Liberal Quaker dynamics. However, the comparison with alteristic responses as set out by this thesis connects the emerging views with the diversity and shifting nature of the Liberal Quaker discursive landscape (via Bakhtin and Derrida). It also offers both more explicit and extensive resources for illuminating how such responses may be further reflected upon, develop and manifest in an experientially focused religious group like the Liberal Quakers.

Turning back to Best's work, Levinas also notably connects his radical ethics of unconditional openness to the other with a radical attitude of nonviolence, saying:

> This presentation [of the Other] is pre-eminently non-violence, for instead of offending my freedom it calls it to responsibility and found it. As non-violence, it nonetheless maintains the plurality of the same and the other. It is peace. (Levinas, 1991:203)

Suggestively, whilst maintaining that young Quakers exhibited a 'pluralisation of values' and varying levels of adherence to Quaker testimonies, Best notes[69] that 'pacifism and the peace testimony' was adhered to the most, being the '[o]nly one [i.e. testimony]… shared by more than one quarter of the respondents' (2008:203). The relative resilience of the peace testimony within the community is doubtless influenced by factors like its historical visibility as an identity marker for the group; it underlay trends like Quaker conscientious objection during the two world wars ('Conscientious objection,' n.d.). This historical visibility appears to be a factor in those suggesting that Quakers reflexively maintain common historic-traditional structures, e.g. Wood, who makes appeals and/or gestures towards pacifism (§4.3.6). However, in light of the second stream of alteristic responses the thesis is delineating, another factor in the resilience of the peace testimony could be its high potential to be synergised with an increased emphasis on openness towards diversity and alterity and consequent intimacy as a constitutive element of Quaker religiosity. Indeed, one of the internal interpretations Dutton encountered in his research[70] seems to make this type of connection, one of his respondents saying ' … peace resembles the way Quakers do business. It de-emphasizes the self, makes space for listening to others, and emphasizes connection … ' (Dutton, 2013:108). Notably, this interpretation came from a participant who had to reconcile a 'theist–nontheist' divide within her Meeting:

[69] In line with the discussion of broader Liberal Quaker adherence to testimonies in §4.3.1.
[70] Mentioned above in §4.3.4.

> She attributes much of her recent spiritual growth to the struggle she underwent while serving on this committee … A great deal of animosity developed between some who didn't want their belief in God or their lack of a belief in God to be silenced. She found herself 'in the middle' of this animosity. The responsibility of directing a reconciliation process fell on her and on one other person. (ibid.)

This seems to add credence to the contention that such interpretations of the commitment to nonviolence may be further provoked by 'divides' such as theism-nontheism.

Indeed, as will be demonstrated, appeals to nonviolence are apparent in other Quaker commentaters who link a concern for relationality and/or alterity with their understanding of Quaker religiosity. With this in mind, it does not seem an unreasonable prediction to suggest that one possible outcome of these internal developments is that both the streams of emerging views may coalesce to result in a renewed emphasis and engagement with attitudes around nonviolence within the group's discursive landscape.

However, the internal Quaker discussions around their diverse and at points contradictory (a)theological culture are currently at a nascent and/or transitionary stage, manifest in the discussion over theism–nontheism and the forthcoming revision of the *Book of Discipline*. Therefore, whilst the present thesis attempts to elucidate possible trajectories on the basis of current trends in expressions of Quaker identity, exploration into the details of how such emerging views ultimately exhibit themselves must be the purview of further research. The thesis maintains, however, that a comparison between the phenomena described by Meads and Best and the thesis' own formulation of emerging alteristic responses holds validity.

It should also be noted that, whilst Meads and Best identify their respective groups of study as somewhat separate from the broader Liberal Quaker community, there is reason to believe that the attitudes and approaches to identity formation will have an influence on the wider group. This includes the ongoing discussions over the *Book of Discipline* and resultant construction of neo-orthodoxy. Meads explicitly advances the Experimenters' community of love/intimacy as offering potential insights for the wider British Liberal Quaker community. Additionally, it is of course evident that Best's research into adolescent Quakers took place around 8-11 years ago; many of his respondents will now have grown out of adolescence and are likely to have brought some of their attitudes forward into the community at large. Furthermore, comparisons may be drawn between the breakdown of the 'culture of silence' via the 'culture of contribution' described by Best and Meads, and the manner in which internal Quaker discussions are currently opening up around the theism–nontheism issue and their (a)theological diversity. If the 'culture of contribution' is influential of some participants' views and experiences of worship and spirituality, as Best and Meads respectively suggest, it follows that such an opening up may provoke similar conceptualisations of the Quaker identity and/or religiosity.

(5.1.2) Quaker Ethics and Ethics of Care

Staying with previous academic work within Quaker Studies, Jackie Leach Scully's work on Quaker ethics also contains insights that are relevant and indicative towards the emergence of alteristic views as this thesis understands them.

Scully argues that Liberal Quakers tend to approach ethics through a 'moral collage', drawing on moral frameworks at different times that are not linked to a 'theoretically consistent, logically coherent form of argumentation' (2008:109). However, she does note that Liberal Quakers generally showcase an affinity for a form of 'virtue ethics' (2008:114). Virtue ethics is an ethical theory that emphasises the importance of cultivating moral character or virtue, as opposed to delineating criteria via which an act may assessed as more or less ethical. Virtue ethics does not focus on the 'act' as essentially measurable in ethical/moral terms, but rather is sensitive to context and emphasises the question of what a good or virtuous person/agent would do in a particular situation (2008:211-212).

Scully suggests a connection between this affinity for virtue ethics and the position of epistemological uncertainty expressed in Dandelion's 'absolute perhaps' (2008:114). She describes its appeal for Liberal Quakers with reference to features which also resonate with the philosophies of discourse found in Bakhtin and Derrida:

> … truth is partial, revelation is contextual and limited, spiritual life is a journey, the spiritual path involves seeking rather than finding. Quaker epistemology and Quaker ethics are deeply historical [and] contextual … [other ethical] deontological and utilitarian frameworks operate around an assumption of *epistemological closure …* An ethical framework based on interior character … presents as more contextual and emergent, necessarily contingent on the moral 'revelation' available at a particular place and time. (2008:114-115)

Scully makes it explicit that an attitude of 'absolute perhaps', beyond being an epistemological one, may also relate to Quaker approaches to ethics and spirituality. Her positioning of the Quaker 'spiritual life' as 'a journey' connected to a deep concern for the 'historical' and 'contextual' mirrors the move towards placing religio-ethical matters as

involving a socially-ethically concerned open eschatology, as seen in the later development of Derrida's thought and as may be applied to Bakhtin's thought (see §2.5.2). Relatedly, the diversifying and anti-systematic accounts of discourse presented by Bakhtin and Derrida may be seen to represent philosophical caution and/or resistance to ultimate closure (Critchley, 2014:20); instead, they operate a sensitivity to the 'polyvalence' of potential interpretations of and within particular contexts (Collins, 2002a:151). These similarities add credence to the contention that formulations developed within and/or as associated with such lines of thought may offer insights into the responses of a group with a bilateral nexus of comparable concerns and mode of development – e.g. '[t]he lack of closure that characterises the Quaker tradition' (Collins, 2002c:93).

Questions may be raised over the making of such links between Scully's formulation of a Liberal Quaker affinity for virtue ethics and this thesis' formulation of an ethics of alterity in relation to the thought of Derrida, Bakhtin and others. The emphasis on the agent within virtue ethics may be seen as at odds with the decentralisation of the subject performed by Derrida and Bakhtin to varying degrees. However, Scully explains that among the ethical virtues valued by Quakers there is an 'identification of a strong *care ethic* among Friends' (2008:118), the 'ethic of care' being an understanding of ethics that 'is defined by an orientation that prioritises relationality and empathy, rather than rights or autonomy' (ibid.). Scully notes that there is debate over whether this approach to ethics that shifts focus away from an autonomous agent should be understood as a 'subspecies of virtue ethics' or a broader ethical concept (ibid.).

Notably, Axel Honneth (1995) and, following him, Critchley (2014 [1999]) have previously understood the Derridean–Levinasian ethic of radical hospitality in terms of being an ethic of care. Their argument is that the commitment of the ethic of radical hospitality to unconditional responsibility and non-reciprocity highlights what is distinctive about the ethic of care's emphasis on empathy over a systematic formulation of universal justice or reciprocal 'equal treatment' (1995:291). Honneth characterises an ethics of care as 'those moral attitudes in which, without considering reciprocal obligations, we attend to the … other' (1995:315). Honneth and Critchley are critical of the attempt by Jürgen Habermas, who has a Kantian-inspired (deontological) approach to discourse ethics, to subsume the other-directedness of an ethics of care 'under the category of solidarity' and 'reciprocal concern' (Honneth, 1995:318; Critchley, 2014:277). Honneth positions 'solidarity' as forming in particular communities with 'shared values' and questions whether this principle and that of 'reciprocal concern' can be symmetrically universalised as Habermas suggests (1995:316-318). Nevertheless, Honneth and Critchley argue that the asymmetrical ethics of care and concern for the other pressurise to be extended beyond those individuals that share one's values, beyond those that offer reciprocity, as borne out in the alteristic ethics of Derrida and Levinas (1995:318-319), with Critchley contending that 'symmetry and universality of justice' should be supplemented with such a notion of 'non-totalizable and asymmetrical relations to the other' (2014:268).

These considerations may be seen as relevant to the formulations of communities of intimacy formed in part around an openness towards diversity (Best, 2008, 2010; Meads 2008, 2011). Whilst the openness to diversity may develop within an intimate community where it is informed by this intamcy and the subsequent tendancy to be met with

reciprocity, if it becomes a core principle – a mark of identity for the group – there may be a growing pressure to extend it beyond the group.

Such concerns also have import when considering Scully's work on Quaker ethics. She argues that Quakers maintain a 'deontological "tether"' which she links to Kantian ideas such the 'categorical imperative' (2008:121). She contends that this tether lends Quakers a 'normative core around which the virtues of Quakers cohere' (2008:122). Scully is sensitive to the diversity and respect for otherness in Quakerism and goes on to associate this 'deontological tether' with '[s]ome kind of centrifugal core of moral value … [which] sets parameters for multiple interpretations of the good life' (2008:121). She expands on this to the effect that the tether lies in 'Fox's injunction to recognise "that of God in every one"', saying: 'The good Quaker not only responds to that of God within herself but recognises and responds to it in others' (ibid.). Therefore, Scully seems to lean towards having some concern for 'equal treatment' and 'reciprocity'

Significantly, however, Scully's 'deontological tether' is still concerned with relationality and other-directedness. Moreover, the fact that the injunction Scully identifies relates to 'that of God in every one' and not 'that of God in every Quaker' seems to place an even more explicit pressure on extending the principle beyond those in the group who will reciprocate the orientation. This pressure becomes somewhat sharper when it is considered that, whilst an expressed commitment to 'that of God in everyone' is fairly pervasive as an expressed commitment amongst Quakers (Dandelion, 1996:289), it is not always interpreted in theistic terms, some members of the group preferring to express it in terms of 'that of good in everyone', as indicated by the remarks from one of Best's respondents (see §5.1.1.1). This is

reflective of the emergence of nontheist elements within group. However, this raises questions concerning how reciprocal this recognition of 'that of God in everyone' actually is within the group, and the extent to which it acts as a cohering core for Quaker values. The intra-dynamics of the group already seem to challenge the parameters of this parameter setting value. Furthermore, if this value is primarily enacted within the Quaker community on reciprocal terms as tolerance across theist–nontheist lines, one may ask what marks this value as distinct from liberal secular values around equal treatment and/or gives it a flavour of religiosity? Additionally, analogous to Honneth and Critchley's criticisms of Habermas' treatment of the ethics of care as solidarity, if greater degrees of openness are simply achieved by Quakers within particular and intimate communities (e.g. Young Quakers and Experimenters), then it seems to cease to be a value Quakers can identify with outside of those contexts, and again that is not particularly distinct from social bonds achievable in secular friendship groups.

Thus, these dynamics would seem to feed into a pressure for a commitment to a more radical, non-reciprocal openness/hospitality to the other, to be framed as informing a core Quaker value, as distinct from wider liberal-secular values of reciprocal tolerance. The radical flavour of such a value could possibly lead to its perception as having qualities of transcendence and/or an experiential religiosity. This is analogous to Derrida's contention that such an ethic breaks down the distinction between the ethical and the religious (see §2.5.2.3). Later sections of the present chapter (§§5.2.1 and 5.2.2) seek to demonstrate further that such analogous considerations of non-reciprocity and radical hospitality are already being made within the Liberal Quaker discursive landscape (internal popular literature), thus presenting themselves as potential candidates for neo-orthodoxy.

(5.1.2.1) Tensions Considered in Relation to Bakhtin and Derrida

The coherence of such a line of development does, however, seem somewhat problematic, in the sense that the distinguishing radicality of the openness it advocates still, paradoxically, puts a tension on the cohesion of the Liberal Quaker community. This is because there is a pressure to be open to those who do not share this value. The manner in which this problem may be responded to can be illuminated though an engagement with Bakhtin and Derrida. Influenced by Buber's concept of the I–Thou relation (Bakhtin, cited in: Friedman, 2001:25), Bakhtin does understand the dialogical self–other relation to be, whilst other-directed, somewhat reciprocal and/or 'mutually dependent' (Collins, 2002b:295). However, he posits that it involves accepting a 'heteroglossia' of various voices, views and interpretations and places the possible understanding and communing of self and others as lying in the imagined ideal of a 'superadresse' (Friedman 2001:29). The present thesis argues for an understanding of such a formulation as presenting a kind of open eschatology, somewhat synergisable with theological concepts of the penultimate and God as the 'last word' (see §2.5.2.2). Derrida pushes the implication of his ethic of openness to the other and unconditional hospitality further, directly equating it with risking violence and destruction to oneself and/or a place (plausibly equatable with a community such as the Liberal Quakers), as he says:

> For unconditional hospitality to take place you have to accept the risk of the other coming and destroying the place, initiating a revolution, stealing everything, or killing everyone. That is the risk of pure hospitality. (1999:170-71, cited in: Kakoliris, 2015:153)

Derrida does note that the risk of this radical form of 'pure hospitality … might be too terrible' (ibid.) and, as has already been indicated, often characterises it as 'impossible' in terms of its actually being acted out (see §2.5.2.3). Derrida's response to this is to place such a principle as a 'messianic' hope and, again, an open and deferred eschatology. Simon Critchley expresses this divide between Derrida's impossible, unconditional alteristic ethic – framed as a demand motivating an ethical experience behind ethical decisions – and the need to make decisions and formulations in particular contexts as follows:

> The infinite ethical demand of deconstruction arises as a response to a singular context and calls forth the invention of a political decision. Politics itself can here be thought of as the art of response to the singular demand of the other, a demand that arises in a particular context — although the infinite demand cannot simply be reduced to its context — and calls for political invention, for creation. (2009:279)

In relation to Liberal Quaker dynamics, the political element here could be framed as the impetus on Quakers to maintain a coherent definable community, whilst the 'infinite ethical demand' is the impossible hope for a more radical and extended openness. This is increasingly emerging as a candidate for one of the community's core values, with the radicality and impossibility of such an ethic lending it appeal since (rightly or wrongly) it may be seen as giving an impression of experiential religiosity or, at the very least, as a value for the diverse group to uphold that beyond-intra-group tolerance and policy of equal treatment.

The consideration of both Bakhtin's and Derrida's thought helps to capture some of the deviations that may occur in the alteristic responses demonstrated in this thesis. Along with connecting the emergence of such alteristic responses with broader Liberal Quaker

dynamics as delineated by Collins (see §2.5.2.1), Bakhtin may also emphasise the manner by which Quakers may move to value mutuality and reciprocity with respect to their openness to intra-group diversity. Derrida and his commentators emphasise how an openness to otherness may become a more peculiar, ultimately impossible, hope beyond these group boundaries. Derrida's work also more explicitly places such an ethical relation as informing a, perhaps warped, notion of experiential religiosity (Derrida, 2001 [1978]:119), However, both thinkers may seem to frame the ultimate resolution for the diverse and fissiparous discursive dynamics as a not necessarily achievable ideal (framed as either perfect dialogical understanding or complete hospitality). This allows them to be framed as advocating a type of open eschatology, with Derrida again making this framing more explicit in his own work.

As previously indicated (§§2.5.2.2 and 2.5.2.3), this connection with eschatology may also elucidate a way for Liberal Quakers to find a confluence of values across theist–nontheist lines. Even if the more theistically inclined prefer to place the final resolution of human diversity with the divine, if religious contemplations within the community are framed as concerned with the penultimate, the process or the journey towards some end either imagined or believed, then practically the eschatology still seems deferred even if not internally deferred for all Quakers. It may therefore suffice for a candidate neo-orthodoxy framed around a mutual alteristic ethic of tolerance towards intra-group tolerance, to be supplemented with a deferred eschatological hope, however framed. Indeed, the later sections of this chapter (particularly §5.2.3) demonstrate this emerging amongst the Liberal Quakers. This also appears close to Dandelion's 'absolute perhaps' (2008a:33-36). However, it thickens an understanding of the manifestation of the latter, in that there is a suggestion of an emerging element within the community that places such an alteristic ethic as a

constitutive part of their religiosity. Even for those who hold a more traditional, divine conception of eschatology, the make-up of the group and these emerging views pressurise them to understand their Quaker identity and/or the Quaker life (Scott 1980:70) in terms of their relation to other Liberal Quakers of diverse views.

However, drawing a comparison with emerging Quaker positions and such a formulation may at this point be too strong. Providing formulations that accurately and/or cleanly capture the dynamics of emerging Liberal Quaker views is complicated by the very fact that they are at this stage emerging. The very diverse, fissiparous, self-reflective character of Liberal Quaker views with which this thesis is concerned further complicates the drawing of points of clean comparison. The anti-systematic orientation of the theorists drawn upon by the thesis as comparative resources for illuminating the trajectory of Quaker development in regard to such alteristic responses is similarly problematic. Indeed, in taking such a comparative approach this chapter may be understood as attempting to 'lump the splitters' (Palmer, 1979). Given the diversity, fluidity and nascent state of the Quaker views being considered, it would be more apt to say the comparative methodology of this chapter employs a family-resemblance model (Wittgenstein, 2009:36), one revolving around features such as relationality, openness to the other, vulnerability, an open or deferred eschatology and nonviolence. Accordingly, the above formulation may invite some scepticism. However, it may be taken as valuable to the extent that it attempts to give some insight into how such responses may manifest in relation to the pervasive diversity of the Quaker group (which presents complicating factors, even internal to those views that offer some response towards accepting and/or incorporating that diversity).

(5.1.2.2) Relation Between an Ethics of Care and Marginalised Groups

Referring more specifically to an ethics of care, it should be noted that, with its emphasis on relationality and other-directedness, it 'was initially closely associated with feminist ethics' and with further research indicating that such an ethical orientation often emphasises 'socially marginalised groups' (Stack, 1979; Cortese, 1990; Tronto, 1993, cited in: Scully, 2008:119).

Relatedly, a number of the thinkers comparatively employed by this thesis in extrapolating an understanding of an alteristic ethics (Bauman; Buber; Derrida; Levinas) are of Jewish ancestry. With the exception of Buber, they published their major works after the Holocaust, an event they all lived through. Levinas' philosophical project and delineation of the ethical experience has been understood as a response to the Holocaust (Eagleston, 2018). Additionally, one of Bauman's most emphatic engagements with Levinas' ethical positions occurs in his book *Modernity and the Holocaust* (1991), which considers lessons the Holocaust can teach approaches to sociology and the sociological critique. Therefore, there is reason to suppose that the development of such positions occurs in response, or at least in correlation to, marginalisation and/or oppression.

In relation to this Scully astutely notes that:

> Seeing the Religious Society of Friends apparently operating in the same way [with an affinity to an ethics of care] … raises some intriguing questions about Quakers perception of themselves in relation to dominant social organisations. (2008:121)

This line of thinking can also be related to Pilgrim's concept of Quakers' operating a heterotopic impulse informed by their history as a socially marginalised and non-conformist group (2008:55-58). The connection with feminist ethics may also motivate associations with British Quakerism's history of taking a progressive stance towards women's rights and women having an active role in the community (Dandelion, 2007:36-37)

This may also raise questions about this thesis's framing of alteristic-type responses emerging in relation to the diversification of the Quaker (a)theological culture. Pilgrims' work around the Quaker heterotopic impulse may better emphasise a factor in their development than the present work. It may also be that Levinas', Bauman's, and perhaps Derrida's development and/or adoption of an ethic of alterity was motivated as a response to persecution. However, the consequence of this is that Levinas, Bauman and Derrida all present an understanding of ethics that looks to emphasise an openness towards the other, as alternate and preferable to more defined, systematic, and perhaps totalitarian, ethico-politico-institutional formulations and/or structures. In relation to the current Quaker case, these other factors in the development of these types of responses do not seem major. This is in the sense that the current issues being wrestled within the Liberal Quaker community are ones of reconciling diverse and incompatible beliefs, and such formulations present themselves as potential resources of response to these dynamics. This is the context in which they are being presented as emerging candidates for neo-orthodoxy.

A further angle on the connection with an ethics of care and feminist thought is that of the American Liberal Quaker and philosopher Laura Rediehs. She has argued that feminist thought and a concern for relationality should be connected with what is at play in Quaker

experiential epistemology (2016:90) – what they are engaging with during the Quaker religious experience. This is demonstrative of a move to place a regard for relationality, other-directedness and ethics as constitutive of the Quaker religious experience. Rediehs contends that there is historical precedent for such a view amongst Liberal Quakers, rather than its being informed by the pluralistic dynamics of Quakerism; a line of her thought that will be further engaged with in §5.1.3.1. However, the concluding sentence of her article in particular demonstrates that she sees the understanding of experience as providing a basis on which diverse perspectives on varying types of religiosity may be integrated:

> Keeping the understanding of 'experience' broad enough to include ethical, aesthetic, relational, and religious experience creates ideal conditions for seeking and allows the integration of scientific and religious perspectives into a unified understanding of reality. (Rediehs, 2016:93)

That said, Rediehs is not directly responding to the issue of nontheism. However, her philosophical position is still usefully indicative that such views are emerging in relation to Liberal Quakerism dynamics and within the group's discursive landscape more broadly. It should be noted that Rediehs' article, whilst still in the academic field of Quaker Studies, is making normative claims concerning the way Quaker philosophy should be viewed, with internal implications. Notably, Best, Meads and Scully are all Quakers and the insider/outsider divide seems often blurred in Quaker Studies (Collins, 2002c) – particularly in the case of Meads who positions the Experimenters as offering helpful insights to the Quaker group (2011:322). Nevertheless, the previous works engaged with in this chapter have ostensibly involved external academic observations made about the Quaker group meaning that the data may be considered somewhat secondary. However, relative to the interests of this thesis, Rediehs' work with her normative philosophical suggestions can to a greater extent be taken as primary data for the types of views emerging amongst Quakers.

§5.1.3 below primarily explores two more relevant works from academic Quaker Studies (another from Rediehs and one from Yasuharu Nakano) that make normative suggestions regarding Quaker philosophy and theology respectively, before §5.2 turns to consider relevant primary textual data more directly engaged in the theism–nontheism issue.

(5.1.3) Rediehs and Nakano: Philosophical and Theological Appeals to Nonviolence, Hospitality and Alterity

(5.1.3.1) Rediehs

The second relevant piece from Rediehs is the chapter 'Truth and Nonviolence: Living Experimentally in Relation to Truth' (2015). In it she argues that Quakers' value for nonviolence informs a potential '"relational" theory of truth', which she positions as a route to responding to postmodern criticisms of 'absolute truth'. Rediehs formulates the postmodern critique as primarily concerning the ability of power to manipulate knowledge, resulting in 'claims to truth' or indeed the 'very notion of absolute truth' (2015:164,168). She therefore holds that 'postmodernism relativizes truth and makes it subservient to power' (2015:169).

This is a particular view of postmodernism, as it places the relativising of truth as the result of power and/or power structures. Rediehs' piece does not engage with an understanding of the postmodernist critique as placing a subject's experience, knowledge, or perception of truth as constituted by cultural-linguistic type structures,[71] although it may be argued that

[71] See §2.3.1, §2.5.2.3 and §3.2.

these accounts still place truth as subject to a type of power, but one that is less explicitly pernicious; perhaps it is simply a case of more banal phraseology.

Additionally, Rediehs accepts the Liberal Quaker temperament towards accepting a diversity of views, quoting from *QF&P*: 'Our vision of truth has to be big enough to include other people's truth as well as our own' (*QF&P*, 1995, 10.28, cited in: 2015:173). She denies, however, that this entails a postmodernist-type rejection and/or the relativising of absolute truth, as she holds that this simply relates to humans' having 'limited' and/or 'different perspectives' on absolute truth (ibid.). Assuming that Rediehs places her 'relational theory of truth' as a constitutive component of the Quaker religious experience and/or spirituality, as her 2016 paper indicates, Rediehs may be seen as aligned with universalist-type assumptions (see §1.3.1). This is because she responds to Quaker diversity by holding that there is a universal truth, but one that is not fully accessible and one that may therefore be expressed in a variety of ways.

However, as discussed in Chapter 3, this response is problematised by the emergence of nontheists, some of whom seemingly hold an incompatible account of truth and/or experience as informed/subject to cultural-linguistic structures. The development of these views is influenced by postmodernist positions. Therefore, if Quakers are to accommodate these nontheists within their diverse culture, as they appear to be aiming to do, Rediehs' formulation concerning how Quakers can both take account of and yet respond to the postmodernist critique has the potential to expand Quakers' resources of response to the internal issue of nontheism.

Rediehs presents her alternative theory of truth as an understanding of 'a dynamic kind of truth powered ultimately by love' (2015:168). This notion of truth being 'powered' is part of Rediehs' response to the postmodernist critique: truth is not relativised by power and/or cultural-linguistic structures, because it has its own power, according to Rediehs, based on a commitment to love and justice. Rediehs associates such a relational, loved-based concern for justice with truth, at one point explicitly saying: 'Justice is truth' (2015:170). Sensitive to the postmodernist consideration of a relation between power and knowledge, Rediehs argues that it is 'only' commitment to nonviolence that ensures the justice being striven for is 'true justice' rather than simply a relativised power move that favours the interests and views of a particularity:

> The central principle of nonviolence is that the only path to true justice is the path of nonviolence … it is *only* the constraint of nonviolence that can ensure that the end be true justice, because the process of enacting nonviolence itself builds justice. (2015:169, emphasis mine)

The view Rediehs presents of justice pursued nonviolently does seem highly other-orientated, as she says of violent responses to injustice:

> Violence only pushes the injustice one suffers onto someone else. This move is 'justified' either by dehumanizing the 'other,' or claiming that the 'other' deserves punishment. (2015:170)
>
> True justice, in contrast to false claims of justice, serves everyone's legitimate needs. False claims to justice privilege some people to the detriment of others. (2015:169).

However, she does present such an approach as resulting in harmonious relationships: 'It is an energy for order, harmony, and the nurturance of individuals and relationships … '(ibid.), suggesting a divergence from the concerns for diversification in, for example, Derrida's thought. Although Rediehs also indicates that the nonviolent response to injustice involves

non-reciprocity: 'violence, when not reciprocated, is … revealed to be brutal and unjustified: another 'truth' exposed by the discipline of nonviolence' (2015:175), she also makes reference to the idiom 'that of God in everyone', saying that '[s]ince Quakers believe that there is that of God in everyone, to harm a person is to harm God' (2015:172). the commitment extends beyond contexts of reciprocal values. Therefore, if the Quaker response to the postmodernist critique (as she formulates it) is to assert a powered truth which ensures its alignment with true justice via a maintained commitment to nonviolence, this would seem to imply that, for true justice to be maintained, such non-reciprocity has to be maintained in the face of violence and danger. In line with Derrida's framing of unconditional hospitality as dangerous and/or impossible as lived, this may in turn raise questions around Rediehs' formulation of nonviolence as 'an energy for order [and] harmony'. It seems more like an 'eschatological' article of 'faith' that others will ultimately respond to the dynamic truth embodied in nonviolence.

Significantly, Rediehs does directly associate the commitment to the power of nonviolence, true justice and love with spiritual strivings and/or divine origins:

> Quakers associate this power of nonviolence with love … associating all of these powerful terms with each other – truth, justice, moral goodness, and love … ascribing to them a divine origin (2015:171)
>
> While academics today are often wary of the concept of God, it is important here to note that the appeal to God by the Quakers … is essentially a belief that there is more to reality … This belief is grounded in an acknowledgement that humans do care about more than mere survival … our quest to bring forth justice … indicate higher strivings that can be called 'spiritual' (2015:172)

The first quotation signifies an acknowledgement of a more theistic commitment in terms of the divine origins of these dynamic values. However, the second one suggests that there is potential for this concept of 'God' and the 'spiritual' to be understood in terms of a 'quest to bring forth justice'. Rediehs' account, which she positions as a Quaker response to the postmodern critique of knowledge, may therefore be seen to have parallels with the breakdown between ethics and religiosity seen in Levinas and Derrida. Redieh's account may be likewise connected to concerns for relational experiences, love and non-violence, linked to non-reciprocity towards other, and an eschatological ideal in line with these concerns.

That Rediehs' delineation of a potential Quaker response to 'postmodernism' finds parallels within the developments in Derrida's thought, which he positioned to defend himself from 'nihilism' (Kearney, 2004:154-155), raises questions over the extent to which Rediehs' response may be thought of as informed by a re-engagement with the historical values of Quakerism, or instead as a motivated, perhaps rather typical response to the contests of diversifying, relativising, postmodern-type dynamics; an issue that will be returned to shortly.

It is first important to note, however, that this comparison between Rediehs and, particularly, Derrida may be contested. Derrida does not actually see it as possible to enact nonviolence, as he understands it, in the world. In response to Levinas, he says: ' … every philosophy of nonviolence can only choose the lesser violence within an economy of violence' (Derrida, 2001:400). This is one place where Derrida may be seen (this thesis contests largely superficially) to diverge from Levinas. The reason Derrida holds this view is

because of his more radical concept of non-reciprocal hospitality and/or nonviolence: that all discursive attempts to codify knowledge of the world potentially impinge on the openness towards otherness. Complete nonviolence for Derrida could only be accomplished via 'a certain silence', which itself still impinges on open expressions of otherness and diversity (Derrida, 2001:185). This would seem to return Derrida to placing knowledge as always impinged upon by power or violence in a way akin to what Rediehs suggests in her delineation of postmodernism.

However, this does not necessarily mean that Derrida's understanding of ethics is completely divorced from an aspiration towards nonviolence and/or indeed concepts of justice. Derrida does advocate that ethical decisions should be aimed at avoiding the worst violence, the worst for Derrida being a violence that completely subsumes the other and otherness within a single codification (Lawlor, 2018). He, therefore places his view of ethical experience as still being motivated by an eschatological aspiration for nonviolence and complete hospitality towards the other – a motivating aspiration he has also previously framed in terms of a conception of 'justice', which, whilst he does not discuss it in terms of truth, he does position as undeconstructable:

> Justice in itself, if such a thing exists … is not deconstructable. No more than deconstruction itself, if such a thing exists. Deconstruction is justice. (Derrida, 1992:13)
>
> … the coming of the other, the absolute and unpredictable singularity of the arrivant as justice. (Derrida, 2006:33)

Derrida's additional claim that '[j]ustice is what gives us the impulse, the drive, or the movement to improve law' (Derrida, in: Caputo, 1997:16), along with Critchley's subsequent

delineation that '[t]he infinite ethical demand of deconstruction calls for political invention, for creation', also places such a 'deconstructive'/alteristic conception of ethics and a commitment to an ideal of nonviolence or justice as relating to a dynamism that attempts to reflect these values – again marking parallels with dynamic relational theory of truth which Rediehs posits.

A key point on which Rediehs and Derrida may diverge is that Rediehs holds that a situation of true justice, 'that which serves everyone's legitimate needs', is fulfillable (2015:169,175). More than that, in Redieh's view 'it is *only* the constraint of nonviolence that can ensure that the end be true justice', because nonviolence intrinsically 'builds justice' (2015:169). By bringing a consideration of violence into his critique, Derrida may be seen to problematise the degree to which nonviolence is a sufficient assurance for 'true justice'.

Responders who may be quick to question Derrida's problematising of nonviolence, may be given pause by considering Gandhi's motivations for his 'nonviolent' '"epic fast" of 1932' (Patankar and Omvedt, 1979:419). Gandhi was a practitioner of nonviolence whom Rediehs draws on extensively and shows parallels with the potential Quaker position for which she argues (2015). Gandhi's protest was largely in opposition to the proposal for separate electorates, which would have granted the Dalit community – marginalised within the historical caste system of the broader Hindu/Indian community – reserved seats, ensuring their political representation. Gandhi's protest is often framed in terms of being motivated by a concern for the unity or harmony of the Hindu community (Patankar and Omvedt, 1979:419), and elsewhere Gandhi did indeed work for the 'embracement' of lower castes (Visvanathan, 2001:3121). However, given that Gandhi's fast did cause Dalit political leaders

to rescind their fight for reserved seats (Patankar and Omvedt. 1979:419), it is questionable whether this would generally be seen, by Quakers or others, as an example of true justice being achieved and accomplished through nonviolent methods. On the contrary, Gandhi may be seen as having used nonviolent means to subsume the otherness and arguably the legitimate grievances of the Dalits. Analogous to a Derridean conception of violence, arguably out of a concern for harmony and love, Gandhi may be said to have performed a more 'structural' form of violence on the Dalits. As Shiv Visvanathan has remarked, 'Gandhi's politics of love often denied dalits the creativity of hate … of anger, of horror, of despair' (2001:3123). This incident, in relation to both Redieh's treatment of and the sustained reputation of Gandhi's nonviolence, may also raise questions over Redieh's contention that nonviolence works to reveal truth and justice.

If it seems questionable that at least a superficial commitment to nonviolence can ensure the fulfilment of true justice, then it is important in Redieh's account to consider what the actual structure of justice is and how her concept of nonviolence relates to and assures this. If, in Rediehs' understanding, justice relates to equal treatment and reciprocal rights, then it seems questionable why nonviolence is needed as the 'only constraint', as reciprocity then also becomes a constraint. What nonviolence seems to add is a commitment to non-reciprocity, the commitment to nonviolence having a component of hope that it will be reciprocated. In centralising nonviolence as part of the Quaker response to the postmodern critique, Rediehs' thought can again be seen to lead her in some ways close to Derrida and Levinas.

Rediehs may hold that Quakers can hold a belief that justice will be fulfilled in relation to their belief in God. However, as mentioned, she has suggested that God and the spiritual may be understood by Quakers in less traditionally theistic terms as a 'quest to bring forth justice' (2015:173). It is unclear how central Rediehs would hold theistic notions to be to the 'relational theory of truth' that she formulates as a resource for Quakers. However, that her account may be seen to break down the divide between spirituality and/or the divine on the other hand and ethical concerns of relationality justice and nonviolence on the other is suggestive of the resources Quakers have and the manner in which they are moving in response to the issue of nontheism (see §5.3).

The potential for synergy between historical Quaker values such as nonviolence and an ethic of alterity raises the question over whether these alteristic responses should be understood as a re-engagment with these values, or a synergisable morphing provoked by Quaker pluralism and the issue of nontheism. Muers raises such a line of thought with direct reference to Levinas, saying: 'Is it possible to say that Quakers, like Levinas, begin with ethics … ?' (Muers, 2010:56). Jeffry Dudiak responds to this in the negative, saying:

> I myself am not convinced that Quakers (at least traditionally) begin with ethics; our 'ethics' rather testify to the God whose proximity finds expression in them, so that 'the power of the Lord can be over all'. (2010:40)

This may be a fruitful area of further academic research and discussion to determine how much of a shift and how novel these responses are in terms of Quaker traditional values as opposed to the groups' current dynamics. However, the present thesis holds that they are certainly being positioned as a response to challenges of diversity, the wish to

accommodate nontheism and subsequent potential relativisation. It also holds that, in line with the comparison with the development of thought in Derrida, Levinas, Bauman, and Bakhtin, there is reason to believe that the diversification itself, and its potential 'structural' influence on phenomenology, subjective views of knowledge, and meaning (see §2.5.2), is a strong factor in their development, alongside the potential, perhaps re-interpreted, confluence with historical values.

(5.1.3.2) Nakano

A more direct engagement with Derrida and Levinas in relation to Liberal Quakerism may be found in the work of Yasuharu Nakano, especially his PhD thesis *Self and Other in the Theology of Robert Barcla*y (2011). In his theological thesis Nakano is concerned with Liberal Quakerism's emphasis on individualism, and the fractiousness and diversification that may invite (2011:1-3). Whilst not directly engaging with the nontheism issue, he can therefore be seen as concerned with the dynamics involved in Quakerism's (a)theological pluralism.[72] He is interested in delineating theological resources that may allow Liberal Quakers to move beyond the individualistic focus, and does this directly in relation to the Quaker peace testimony and values.

Nakano argues directly that the Quaker understanding of the peace testimony should be considered in the light of insights from Levinas and Derrida regarding an account of radical 'hospitality' towards otherness (2011:176-177). He positions an ethic around self–other relations as potentially informing understandings of 'primary experience and human

[72] See §§0.1–1.2.

existence' (2011:184). The greater orientation towards the others is suggested as a counterpoint to Liberal Quakers individualism.

Nakano does go on to develop his position expressed in theistic terms, drawing upon Barclay and the theologian Stanley Hauerwas to suggest that such a radical hospitality linked with a commitment to nonviolence may be underpinned by a concept of God (2011:185). Consequently, he is informed by an understanding of the Quaker community as still 'religiously' i.e. God based, alongside an eschatological endeavour towards a 'peaceful Kingdom' and/or the 'perfection' and 'possibility of God's Kingdom' (2011:3;305-306). His treatment of Levinas may therefore be seen as similar to that of a number of other Quakers, such as Dudiak's (quoted above in §5.1.3.1), in that they find much agreement between Levinas and Quaker ethics, but may respond to the more radical suggestion of asymmetrical and/or non-reciprocal responsibility by suggesting underpinning their ethics with reference to concepts of the divine.

However, this resource of response seems to be exactly what the emergence of nontheism within the group challenges; moreover, as previously discussed, it seems to a large extent that Quakers favour an openness to diversity and nontheism rather than definitively affirm a commitment to the divine. In this light, Nakano's work can be seen as an instance of thinkers such as Derrida and Levinas being directly reflexively employed to inform Quaker theology, which serves to demonstrate that such concepts are present in the Quaker discursive landscape. Furthermore, given that Levinas and, explicitly, Derrida (in his employment of Levinas) may be seen to break down the divide between the ethical and the

religious and/or the atheistic and theistic,[73] it is plausible that such alteristic appeals to an ethic of hospitality may be employed with a view to resolving problems currently perceived by Quakers in the binary divide between theism and nontheism. Indeed, via an engagement with sources more directly engaged in the theism–nontheism debate, the next section, §5.2, will demonstrate that a shift akin to this is very much at play in the more direct emerging responses.

(5.2) Internal Popular Literature and Discussions

(5.2.1) Harvey Gillman: A Spirituality of Hospitality

One fairly evident internal, direct engagement with Levinas, alongside an advocacy for a consideration of Quaker spirituality as based on a radical hospitality, is in the popular output of Harvey Gillman.

Gillman regularly contributes to internal popular discussions in organised talks and conferences, group periodicals (*The Friend* and *Friends Quarterly)* as well as his own publications. Whilst he eschews both the labels of theist and nontheist, he has developed his thought along the lines of responding to Quaker diversity and/or the theism–nontheism divide. In 2018 he was invited to speak at the Nontheist Friends Network Annual Conference.

[73] Discussed in §2.5.2.3.

At the conference he 'declared himself to be an "unstructured" thinker and speaker' (Gillman, 2018). This highlights the difficulties in pinning down his exact position and thus establishing exact parallels with the developments of philosophical projects considered by this thesis. However, as will be seen, there are enough instances of resemblances and cases of, albeit somewhat idiosyncratically interpreted, direct employment of such developments in his work to consider Gillman as presenting what the thesis frames as emerging alteristic response in fairly direct relation to the phenomena of (a)theological diversity and nontheism.

At the conference, Gillman related:

> I almost proudly declared that I am neither theist nor non-theist: the categories simply do not fit. Provocatively I did call myself non-non-theist, but that was falling into the same trap … I am part of WE. For me the spiritual journey, is one of deepening an awareness of this relationship … The interconnecting spirit or Spirit I call God. That is the name that I have inherited, but God is not the name of God. For humans to treat each other badly and destroy the planet is a form of blasphemy … It is my understanding of George Fox's call that we answer that of God in each other. This transcends even 'that of good', because the call is more existential, it is deeper even than ethics … my understanding of the divine transcends the personal, though we as persons may relate to it personally. It is for this reason that I am happy to adopt the term 'transtheist' – but that is only a word. (ibid.)

Gillman may be seen as presenting this 'transtheist' position as an alternative to both theism and nontheism – contestably a candidate for a loose neo-orthodoxy. Notably, he associates this position with relationships, relationality, ethics and consideration for each other. He also places it as transcending ethics in the sense that it transcends the personal; however, it is unclear here what he means. Certainly, though, this extract shows indications that he may amenable to the type of breakdown between ethics and religiosity that Derrida

contests is seen in Levinas.[74] The transcending of the personal, he suggests, may be influenced by a consideration of others' universally requiring unconditional hospitality whether this is understood with reference to a concept of divinity or not. Aspects of this line of thought may be seen as apparent elsewhere in Gillman's output, but in this talk he does not make the point explicit.

In an earlier paper for *Friends Quarterly*, 'Wrestling with the Stranger: Dilemmas of the Spiritual Life' (2012), Gillman makes direct reference to Levinas. Once again this demonstrates how the engagement with academic critique seen in educated groups can complicate clear academic delineations of the factors of development within those social contexts (à la Giddens, 1991). His remarks on Levinas concern the degree to which Quakers should recognise their diversity:

> One of the greatest Jewish teachers of the twentieth century was Emmanuel Levinas. He talks of the presence of God in the face of the other. And the face of the other is different from my own. There is a tendency to want to overlook difference. We are all the same really, so why bother with difference. We are all the same really so why bother to notice our differences? Somehow I do not think that is very respectful. (2012:39)

The latter part of this excerpt shows a concern for respecting difference rather than assuming that '[w]e are all the same really'. This may be related to the breakdown in the universalist accommodation, and Quakers' desire to properly engage in their differences (see §3.5). Significantly, Gillman discusses this directly in relation to Levinas, and via him considers it as connected to concerns for spirituality and God. In the paper, he frames 'the basic dilemma of the spiritual life' to be a question of how extensively Quakers offer hospitality:

[74] See §2.5.2.3.

> … the basic dilemma of the spiritual life. Do we offer hospitality – hope, love and trust – or do we close the door in a frenzy of individualism, materialism, or self-righteous fundamentalism, which is a form of religious materialism? (2012:40)

Gillman seems at least to have an affinity for understanding the issues Quakers are grappling with in similar terms to Levinas and indeed Derrida – that is, revolving around the tension between the extent to which Liberal Quakers as a group define their boundaries and the degree to which they are hospitable towards otherness. In the 2012 piece Gillman's response to this dilemma again shows parallels with the ethics of alterity exhibited particularly in Derrida and Levinas, in that he favours openness to otherness, and suggests that such a position may actually be understood as a 'form of spirituality':

> … the fear … of being without boundaries may lead us backwards to a time … when we were not confronted by otherness. This is the root of fundamentalism, which is the theology of exclusion. The form of spirituality which speaks to my condition is one of hospitality. (2012:33)

It must, however, be said that the degree to which Gillman's position is consistent or fully worked out is questionable. He is quite clear about the fact that he is not trying to give any structure or systematic outline of his thoughts. He often seems to leave the question of divinity open. At certain points he seems to emphasise a mutually interconnected 'WE' relationship in his understanding of spirituality; at other points he seems to favour a more extended openness. However, he does not deliberate much on how far this alteristic-informed spirituality and/or ideal can be pushed in relation to those permitted to be or remain within the Quaker community, along with how the community would practically protect itself against those who would actively do them harm. These considerations notwithstanding, the thesis holds that Gillman's reflections are demonstrative of alteristic responses emerging amongst Quakers as an attempt to respond to their current dynamics.

For this reason, they are valuable to consider in this exploration of the current process in which Liberal Quakers are engaged, of trying to construct candidates for neo-orthodoxy.

(5.2.2) Hugh Rock's Social Theism

Another frequent contributor, largely to the internal popular literature of the Liberal Quaker group, who has explicitly tried to respond to the theism–nontheism divide with parallels to this thesis' delineation of alteristic responses is Hugh Rock. Rock's personal beliefs would identify him as a non-theist. He is a member of the NFN UK Steering Group Committee and spoke at their regional conference in 2017 ('Regional Conference in Bristol,' 2017). However, a substantial amount of his output has been devoted to developing and presenting a theology of 'social theism', which he explicitly positions as seeking to resolve the theism–nontheism divide. Rock's concept of social theism shares many parallels and resemblances with the features delineated by this thesis in the alteristic responses developed from relevant philosophical and theoretical accounts of discourse.

Rock advocates within social theism that 'God-talk' primarily refers to human and moral relations, contrasting this directly with the universalist-type concept that mysticism or religious experience is concerned with universal oneness:

> … the compassion of adherents to this God [the God of social theism] is derived directly from the nature of human relationships, in contrast to the mystic's indirect derivation of compassion from the experience of universal 'oneness' (Rock, 2014a:238)

Here Rock may be seen to universalise religiosity with reference to self–other relations, in a move once again akin to those made by Levinas and, especially, Derrida. He even goes on to say: '*human relations are integrally religious* … this accords with the … universal presence of religion' (2014c:228 emphasis original). However, he denies that this means that his social theism model 'results in shallow humanism' or 'empty radical humanism' (2014c:33). A key basis for this denial is that Rock frames this relationality as being informed by an other-directedness, to the point of non-reciprocity. Rock names this a 'super ethic' which entails '*the respect for the autonomy and absolute fulfilment of every person*' (2014c:291 emphasis original). In teasing out the non-reciprocity, Rock makes direct reference to the Quaker commitment to nonviolence, placing such a commitment to non-reciprocity as 'the beginning of the architecture of Quaker religion':

> The principle of the respect for the autonomy of others is the beginning of the architecture of Quaker religion … absolute refusal to reciprocate violence, to the extent that one is prepared to be killed rather than retaliate, represents absolute respect for the autonomy of others (Rock, 2014b:22-23)

The parallels between Rock and the ethics of unconditional hospitality may already be fairly strong. However, they go further, in that Rock notes that such a commitment to non-reciprocal nonviolence is likely to be impossible in real life. However, for Rock, as for Derrida, it is exactly this tension and impossibility that gives the 'super ethic' the character of religiosity:

> This absolute respect for the autonomy is a principle exceedingly difficult to implement for anyone but a passionate idealist. It is impossible that human society could be organised on the basis of non-violence. It only takes one person to destroy that basis … But it is right here in the tension between the visionary and the rational that we encounter the energising principle essential to religion. Nonviolence is both a fabulous ideal for human relations and … fabulously irrational (2014c:302)

Rock understands this 'super ethic' as embodying 'the authority of non-authority', which he in turn connects with a conception of religious or ethically informed anarchism (2014c:292-294). However, perhaps more significantly, he directly connects this open relational anarchism with eschatological concepts around the Kingdom of God, stating: 'The Anarchist vision is the same as the vision of the Kingdom of God' (2014c:335). Again, with extreme resonance to the ethics of alterity as delineated in §2.5.2.3, Rock ultimately understands eschatology as comprising an impossible ideal of perfect relations between self and other:

> The implementation of the Kingdom of God is a faithful statement of the tragic condition of human existence. Humans are immersed in a bipartite social structure consisting of a religious and political dimension, we are not individually the sufficient creator of it, and therefore do not control it. Humans are condemned by the twin structural levels of human existence perpetually to work for an ideal society that will never be accomplished. The social reality that the kingdom represents is the contrast between the human nature that is and the human nature that can be imagined. (2014c:395)

Again, a parallel may be drawn between the divide Rock makes between the political and religious dimensions and the distinction Critchley makes in Derrida's thought between the motivating 'ideal' of the infinite ethical demand of deconstruction and the need to make imperfect political decisions.

Questions may be raised about whether Rock's formulations around social theism are likely to be acceptable to more 'theistically' inclined Quakers. The strength with which he has stated that eschatology simply relates to imagined ideals is likely to be antithetical to them. Whilst Rock may be part of a developing impetus towards a consideration of relationality, ethics, nonviolence and/or an imagined eschatology within the Quaker discursive landscape, it may be that to be more palatable as a candidate for neo-orthodoxy, an attitude akin to

the ‘absolute perhaps’ may have to be placed over eschatological questions. Indeed, as the next section explores, this type of move may be evidenced in some collective internal discussions of Quakers more closely connected to the group’s institutional structures, with a clearer mandate for trying to find a resolution to the theism–nontheism issue ahead of the revision of the *Book of Discipline*.

(5.2.3) Rachel Muers and Britain Yearly Meeting

Indications of alteristic responses revolving around a breakdown in the divide between relations with the transcendent other as God and other individuals, framed in terms of an open eschatology, may also be seen in some Quaker discussions more closely related to the institutional process of revising the *Book of Discipline*. Notably, in *God, Words and Us* Muers offers this reflection:

> … What the non-theist is rejecting is something problematic (e.g. the ‘God’ who won’t let you use your brain). What the non-non-theist, the believer in God, is rejecting is also something problematic (e.g. the ‘common sense’ that won’t let you believe that your experience really happened). They can – I’m assuming here – recognise and celebrate each other’s rejection-of-problematic-belief …
>
> *… If there’s no condemning-judge-in-the-sky, what do I find when I ask the questions I was afraid to ask? If I’m not alone, who is it who accompanies me?* And when we start asking *that* kind of question – with our lives as well as our minds – we’re released individually and as a community into a wide open space, a journey …
>
> and then the question for the community, which then shapes (or ought to shape) our thinking about something like the book of discipline, becomes ‘how can we be each other’s good companions on this journey?’ (Muers, in: Rowlands, 2017:67)

Muers is concerned with breaking down the opposition between theism and nontheism. She does this by emphasising that both views are trying to avoid perceived restrictions on individuals engaging with their experience authentically. She asks the not entirely answered question, 'who is it who accompanies me?' Then there is a move from talking about the accompaniment of God (not as a condemning-judge-in-the-sky) to being good companions to each other. A correspondence is suggested between 'God's' company – what might be called a theistic concept of religious experience – and each other's company. There is an attempt to disrupt the divides between ethics and religion – theism and nontheism along a similar line to the one taken by Derrida. Additionally, Muers frames this accompaniment positively as in the context of a 'wide open space, a journey', a framing that may be read hinting at eschatological notions where the final word is deferred and couched in an attitude of 'perhaps'.

Additionally, alteristic notions with resonance to notions in Levinas and Derrida, especially, may be seen to have been expressed at the 2018 Yearly Meeting in Britain, where the forthcoming revision of the *Book of Discipline* was formally approved. Mark Russ related in a blog post following that meeting that the meeting involved discussion of vulnerability, a concept Russ held to be vitally important if Quakers were going to engage with their diversity as their 'strength'. This again demonstrates that, as discussed in Chapter 3, the formerly typical employment of universalist-type assumptions in resolving points of Quaker theological conflict appear to be breaking down in the wake of the current discussions Quakers are engaged in, chiefly, around nontheism:

> It struck me that, when we say 'our diversity is our strength', this must include all the ways that Quakerism is expressed throughout the world. It must even include those expressions of Quakerism that make us uncomfortable. For our diversity to truly be our strength we must pay a price, and that price is the need to have deep and difficult conversations with each other, face to face, about what we hold most dear.
>
> So the work before us is costly, and will require us, as Alex Wildwood shared, to be vulnerable … To be vulnerable is to be wound-able. This work, if we do it right, will be painful … British Quakers have a difficulty with wounds … Revising our book of discipline will only be a success if we can countenance its failure, if we can acknowledge our own frailty. Quakers have got things wrong before. We aspire to live adventurously, and a story is only an adventure if there is the possibility of danger and defeat. (Russ, 2018)

Significantly, Russ also related this consideration of vulnerability to spiritual concerns, which he personally framed in theistic, Christian language: 'If in Jesus, God is wound-able, then the Spirit of God is also the Spirit of vulnerability' (ibid). The potential for these notions around a spirituality informed by openness and vulnerability to diversity, to be framed in both 'traditional Christian' and more non-religions terms may add credence to the contention that such conceptualisation may gain further prominence as Liberal Quakers work towards reconciliation.

Russ's engagement with this vulnerability alongside his consideration of postliberal Quakerism[75] also speaks to how the divide between reflexive-structural responses and alteristic responses, as a way of framing streams and developments within the Liberal Quaker discursive landscape, is somewhat artificial and often becomes blurred. Individual Liberal Quakers' own internal reflections, as Scully points out in relation to Quaker ethics (see §5.1.2), are not necessarily consistent and may take a 'collage' approach to the different resources available. However, in terms of elucidating the trajectory of

[75] See §4.3.6.

developments in Liberal Quaker thought and semiotic dynamics, it is to be hoped that the streams delineated in this thesis have served as conceptually useful. Additionally, as has been indicated previously, there is potential for synergy between the two lines of response, which may offer insight into how they may actually manifest within the group's landscape. §5.3 will therefore now discuss these possibilities, alongside a consideration of how likely they are to be expressed as 'neo-orthodoxy'.

(5.3) Interaction with Other Elements of Liberal Quakerism: Responses Expressed as New Orthodoxy and Potential Synergy Between Reflexive-Structural and Alteristic Responses

Considering the emerging lines of response delineated by the thesis, they may all be seen to have points of appeal and disadvantages as candidates for neo-orthodoxy (or orthopraxy) in relation to Liberal Quaker dynamics and sensibilities.

A reflexive-structural response centred around orthopraxy, often constituting an explicit internal adoption of Dandelion's formulations of Quaker coherence being based around orthopraxy, possibly supplemented with a validation of the 'absolute perhaps' as a commitment to continual seeking (Dandelion, 2008a:25-36), may be seen to give Quakers a relatively tangible basis for a coherent identity whilst allowing for a diverse, permissive (a)theological culture (Dandelion, 2008a:22). However, the stability of such formulations is questionable. Viewed internally, they limit the allowance for any common discursive expressions of Quaker belief, and place the core of Quakerism as somewhat removed from concepts of experiential religiosity. Additionally, considering that the group's dynamics

involve high levels of reflexive, self-reflection and, within that, idiosyncratic interpretations, the stability of such formulations may be suspect when viewed externally. Liberal Quakers may to be seen to employ extended notions of what counts as Quaker practice in relation to Dandelion's understanding of the behavioural creed. This tendency of Quakers to further reflect upon and extend notions of Quaker practice potentially feeds into the development of idiosyncratic constructions and discursive expressions of the Quaker identity. Some of these developments seeming work to actively break down the conformity of the form of Quaker worship as seen amongst the young Quakers and Experiment with the Light group.

Internal discursive reflexive-structural responses – seen in Daniels and Wood (2015a, 2016a, 2016b) – may be seen to respond to the fact that Quakers continually reflect and discuss with one another – producing discursive resources. This leads to a suggestion that Liberal Quakers can and should build and/or maintain common structures that extend beyond orthopraxy: perhaps drawing on Quaker history and tradition, a 'shared story', in order to, with a self-awareness, maintain a sense of common identity. Such responses have internal appeal in the sense that they posit something tangible as structuring the sense of Quaker identity and/or 'orthodoxy'. However, the notion that one could get Liberal Quakers to agree upon, and not diverge from, any more discursive points of commonality is dubious. Furthermore, such responses again seem to frame the Quaker identity as removed from experiential religiosity.

The alteristic responses considered in this chapter exhibit a greater consideration for the religious experience and spirituality. They indicate a line of response to the diversity and conflicting elements within the Liberal Quaker (a)theological culture which understands the

very openness towards otherness/diversity and relationality as a constitutive part of Liberal Quaker spirituality. They may be seen as trying to resolve the theism–nontheism divide by making moves around breaking down the distinction between religious and ethical experiences with the other, and/or by focusing discussions on a relational ethic of alterity within an eschatology which is left open to be framed theistically or nontheistically. The weakness of these responses is that they are not typically systematic. Whilst they may have been framed as attempting to offer an account of Quaker spirituality that considers the diversity of views within the group, it is questionable whether such formulations will successfully appeal to individuals who do not have an affinity for the type of framing they are giving to the Quaker experience.

Thus, the likelihood of any of these candidates for neo-orthodoxy being adopted as 'new orthodoxy', in the sense of being an accommodating rationale operating with the previous extensiveness of the universalist-type assumptions, is low – a result that is perhaps expected, given Quakers' commitment to openly engaging with the diversity within their group. Nevertheless, the present thesis holds that exploring these developments within Liberal Quakerism has potential thickening illuminations relating to the permutations of development, particularly with regards to liberal, permissive, reflexive and/or liquid religious groups. Furthermore, the thesis' explorations may still contribute some insights regarding the future expressions of British Liberal Quakerism.

Given that the format of the *Book of Discipline* is itself diverse and anthological in nature, it was and is still unlikely that the forthcoming revision will present a definitive formulation of what might approximately be called Quaker 'orthodoxy'. Even the accommodating

universalist assumptions, while typical, were not definitive and all-encompassing within the group. What may be said with some confidence is that the types of response delineated in this thesis are likely to find a place within the *Book of Discipline* revised in light of the issue of nontheism.

Additionally, it is a notable observation that both the discursive reflexive-structural responses and the alteristic responses trend towards an affinity for nonviolence and the Quaker peace testimony. The commitment to nonviolence stands out as a lauded and well-recognised feature of Quaker tradition and/or history. Additionally, it synergises well with the other-orientated-ness emphasised in alteristic responses. Levels of adherence to, and interpretations of, the peace testimony may remain somewhat varied on a popular level (Hampton, 2014:29; Dandelion, 1996:121-122). However, this confluence of affinities, along with Dutton's suggestion that some markers for Quaker identity are often emphasised in compensation for the diminishment of others (2013:110), motivates a prediction that, as Liberal Quakers continue their current trajectory of development, considerations of nonviolence may in turn become more prominent in the group's internal literature covering discussions of Quaker identity.

(5.4) Summary

This chapter has demonstrated the emergence, within Liberal Quakerism, of what the thesis has demarcated as alteristic responses (to the diversity of belief within the Quaker group and particularly the emergence of nontheism). These responses, as indicated, were illuminated in comparison to developments of thought in Bakhtin, Derrida, Levinas and

Bauman. Loosely, they were delineated as revolving around an understanding of a religio-ethical experience informed by an openness towards the other, such an understanding having the potential to be directed towards breaking down the distinction between ethics and religiosity, between theism and nontheism. The chapter attempted to give an indication of the way in which these emerging views may seek to resolve the divides and tensions within the Liberal Quaker community. However, as mentioned, given the nascent stage of the developments under consideration and the anti-systematic leanings of the modes of thought being compared, the chapter held that the comparative points being made could be understood with reference to a 'family resemblance' model revolving around features such as relationality, other-directedness, hospitality, vulnerability, a radical understanding of nonviolence and an open eschatology.

In demonstrating the emergence of these views, the chapter drew upon previous work done in the field of Quaker Studies on Young Quakers (Best, 2010, 2008), the 'Experiment with Light' group (Meads, 2011, 2008) and Scully's work on Quaker ethics (2008). These gave an indication of the direction of developments in the Quaker movement which suggest a view of the Quaker identity, religiosity and/or spirituality as constitutively informed by an openness to diversity and/or difference. Comparative developments were also observed in the philosophical and theological work of Rediehs (2015; 2016) and Nakano (2011). Finally, such responses were demonstrated as observable in the work of internal commentators more specifically responding to the challenges of the theism–nontheism issue (Gillman 2012, 2014, 2018; Rock, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c), some with close connections to the group's institutional bodies, i.e. the Revision Preparation Group and BYM (Rowlands, 2017; Russ, 2018).

The chapter ended with a consideration of the potential points of synergy between reflexive-structural and alteristic responses and how they might manifest as neo-orthodoxies and/or new orthodoxy with reference to the forthcoming revision. One particular potential point of synergy suggested was around that of nonviolence, the more discursively orientated reflexive-structural responses often pointing to the commitment to nonviolence as a key aspect of the tradition. Alteristic responses often understand nonviolence with reference to an ethic of non-reciprocal openness towards the other. Subsequently, the thesis suggested that a possible outcome of the theism–nontheism debate may be an increased prominence of a value for nonviolence in Quaker discussions and expressions of the Quaker identity. However, regarding 'new orthodoxy' it is unlikely that any of these formulations will achieve the status of a clear, pervasive or stable authority, even comparable to the previous prominence of typical universalist-type assumptions. However, it does seem likely that they will achieve some representation with the anthological format of the forthcoming *Book of Discipline*, plausibly presented as options for how Quaker diversity may be internally approached.

Conclusion

(6.1) Summary and Key Findings

This thesis has examined some emerging views from (primarily) British Quakerism in response to the increased visibility of nontheism and the broader diversity of belief that exists within the group.

The project took as its starting point the Quaker custom of generationally revising their *Book of Discipline* to align with developments in popular belief. With the latest revision having been completed in 1994 and released the following year, the British Quakers recently started considering a new revision, approving the start of the official process at BYM in May 2018 ('Yearly Meeting 2018,' 2018: Minute 31). Prior to this, a consultation with Local and Area Meetings identified theism–nontheism as the priority issue that needed resolving with reference to the revision (Boulton, 2016:57).

Awareness of the forthcoming revision (both before and after its official initiation) motivated a intensification of Quakers' explicitly engaging with the theism–nontheism divide and their (a)theological diversity, discussing and reflecting upon it in workshops, think tanks, popular publications and blog posts. The thesis considered the Quaker process of revision, and these popular reflections and discussions, with reference to Dandelion's formulation of the Liberal Quaker construction of candidate neo-orthodoxies ahead of new revisions, for possible uptake as new orthodoxy. However, whilst the thesis understood

Liberal Quakers as attempting to construct candidate neo-orthodoxies, it did not argue for the group's constructing clear formulations around a decisive new orthodoxy. To attempt to make such an argument would have been insensitive to both the fact that the revision is in a nascent state and the general dynamics of the Liberal Quaker group.

The thesis argued that the dynamics of Liberal Quaker development and the emerging views could be illuminated with reference to theories of 'late' modernity alongside comparative resources drawn from developments in the projects of 'postmodernist' thinkers and/or discourse theorists. With regard to the theories of late modernity, the thesis took a particular interest in Anthony Giddens' formulation around radical modernity, a formulation that argues for a dynamic of reflexivity as informing a sense of uncertainty and shifting around knowledge and meaning. The thesis held, in line with previous work in the field of Quaker Studies, that Liberal Quakers exhibit a high degree of such reflexivity, and that in relation to the Liberal Quaker case there was merit in Giddens' argument that diverse and shifting attitudes around knowledge and meaning did not necessarily entail an epistemological commitment to non-foundationalism. It also noted that a consideration of a dynamic of self-aware reflexivity was useful in exploring how groups within 'hypermodern' or radically modern contexts might formulate responses to the challenges of an uncertain and shifting dynamics around structures of meaning.

However, with regard to the philosophical thought of 'postmodernist' and/or discourse theorists (i.e. Derrida and Bakhtin), the thesis demonstrated that internal to the development of their own thought they also reflected upon and attempted to give responses to views of their accounts of meaning and discourse as fissiparous, 'nihilistic' or

'free play' (Kearney, 2004:154). Therefore, the thesis questioned whether the nuances of these schools of thought should be understood as 'non-foundational all the way down' (Critchley, 2009:84) as Giddens suggests. In any case the thesis argued that the developments in these projects offered useful comparative resources for illuminating how Liberal Quakers respond to their own discursive landscape which seemingly invites analogous dynamics of e.g. fissure, diversification, points of tension (e.g. theism–nontheism) and a resistance to definitive closure.

Here, the thesis built upon a suggestion made by Collins at the end of one of his papers with regard to the potential implications of Bakhtin's 'philosophical anthropology' (2002b:294). The line of argument was also compared to Zygmunt Bauman's early work on postmodern ethics (1993). However, the thesis went further in explicating the manner in which such trajectories of thought may have implications for framings of religiosity with aspirations towards resolving divides such as that of theism–nontheism.

Accordingly, drawing upon these theoretical and comparative frameworks, the thesis delineated and demonstrated two streams of internal response amongst Liberal Quakers. These responses the thesis termed (1) reflexive-structural responses and (2) alteristic responses.

The reflexive-structural responses were presented exhibiting Liberal Quakers' high level of reflexive self-awareness of their group's dynamics, often bolstered via an engagement with academic critique. They respond to the group's diverse and at points conflicting (a)theological culture via claims that common internally cohering structures – be they

behavioural, historical, traditional, narrative or cultural-linguistic – can be maintained on the reflexive and pragmatic basis that they function to maintain a distinct and definable sense of the Liberal Quaker identity. The alteristic responses were understood and formulated with reference to the developments of thought seen in Bakhtin and Derrida (along with to an extent Levinas and Bauman). Generalising in the extreme, these responses revolve around an ethical concern for openness towards otherness (or alterity), recurrently framed in relation to an understanding of a religio-ethical experience. However, ultimately the thesis understood the nascent and somewhat anti-systematic manifestation of these responses as connected via a 'family resemblance'-type model revolving around features such as relationality, other-directedness, hospitality, vulnerability, a radical understanding of nonviolence and an open eschatology.

The thesis held that this framing of two streams of responses presents an edifying picture of the views emerging within Liberal Quakerism, thereby indicating how groups such as the Liberal Quakers are liable to react to challenges and difficulties (such as theism–nontheism and/or a broader group diversity) around cultivating a solid or definitive sense of identity. It has demonstrated the validity of this framing with regard to the Liberal Quaker case through primarily qualitative data drawn from text-based popular Liberal Quaker sources (publications, periodicals and blog posts) which internally discuss the relevant subject matter.

To give a summary of the major points argued for and/or demonstrated in each chapter: Chapter 1 argued that the old Quaker orthodoxy, dating from around the time of the 1994 revision of the *Book of Discipline*, can be loosely understood with reference to a set of

accommodating universalist assumptions. These assumptions look to resolve the diversity of Quaker theological belief by claiming that the diversity of belief still relates to a common universal religious experience, with the variation stemming from differences and difficulties in giving expression to this 'ineffable' experience. However, the chapter also noted indications of Quakers offering formulations that potentially pushed beyond this universalist framework ahead of the 1994 revision.

These developments were framed under a contention that Liberal Quakerism should be understood as a religious group that, in its inception, embraced the implications of modernity. This contention was further illuminated with reference to the insights of the sociologist Peter Berger and the thought of Troeltsch and Campell on mystic religion as the preferred religion of the modern mind-set and/or educated classes. The thesis argued that this understanding of mystic religion resonated well with the typical universalist assumptions that Liberal Quakers have previously operated as a loose 'orthodoxy'. Its characterisation of Liberal Quakerism as a religion of the 'educated classes' also aligned with the generally high levels of education and self-reflection.

The degree to which this form of religiosity can be understood as either a social anti-type (feeding into further de-structuring) or simply a step on the road to secularisation was considered. However, the chapter made the suggestion that the religion of the educated classes does not necessarily remain static, going on to connect this with the reflexive-structural and alteristic responses explored in the subsequent chapters. Again, it was noted that these developments and permutations may be seen as part of the process of secularisation – an appealing notion given their relation to nontheism in the Quaker case.

However, the thesis ultimately remained neutral on whether these developments ended in secularisation, and contended that these permutations are still worthy of thickening and further study.

Chapter 2 examined academic formulations from the field of Quaker Studies concerning how Liberal Quakers may go about coherence-creation in response to a diversity that could extend beyond the universalist accommodating framework. It considered Dandelion's constructions around the behavioural creed or orthopraxy. However, it noted that a number of questions had been raised within the academic field about the probable stability of Quaker orthopraxy as a point of Quaker coherence. Subsequently, the chapter also gave a closer consideration of Dandelion's conceptualisation of the 'absolute perhaps' and Quakers' normatively operating prescribed attitude of uncertainty towards theological claims. This was also the chapter that examined Liberal Quaker dynamics in relation to theories of 'late' modernity and analogous developments of thought in the projects of 'postmodernist' thinkers/theologians and/or discourse theorists (e.g. Derrida and Bakhtin), as discussed above. The chapter argued that insights and comparative points drawn from both these areas could illuminate the Liberal Quaker response to the issue of nontheism and their broader dynamics, responses the thesis delineated as reflexive-structural and alteristic.

Chapter 3 looked at the emergence of nontheism in more detail. It argued that the most prominent expression of nontheism – i.e. the Boulton–Cupitt line – was not compatible with the formerly accommodating universalist-type assumptions. Significantly, the chapter also demonstrated that the general responses of Liberal Quakers to the phenomenon of Boulton–Cupitt nontheism indicate that they do not wish to exclude them from the group.

Moreover, in this engagement there is a growing temperament to note and respect differences rather than subsuming them under the assumption that they are speaking to the same, common religious experience and/or endeavour. It was argued that this signified a breakdown in the former 'orthodoxy' of the universalist accommodation, demonstrating the sharpness of the challenges and tensions with which the group is currently grappling. The impetus to respect and engage with the nontheists was considered in light of Dandelion's concept of 'absolute perhaps'. The chapter argued that the 'absolute perhaps' captured the temperament with which Liberal Quakers were responding to Boulton–Cupitt nontheists. However, the chapter argued that the potential incorporation of the nontheists raised questions over how the 'absolute perhaps' manifested: how far it extends, and whether its potential transmutation into a simple broad tolerance degrades Liberal Quakers' ability to sustain their identity as a religious group. This led into the work of the subsequent chapters with reference to the emerging views which seek to respond to and respect diversity, whilst still attempting to retain an understanding of Quaker religiosity and/or the group's distinct identity.

Accordingly, Chapter 4 explored some of the conceptual moves made by nontheists in defending the legitimacy and/or authenticity of their Quaker identity, alongside some of the broader internal attempts to formulate the Quaker identity in ways that attempt to resolve the theist–nontheist divide. The chapter demonstrated that this group of responses could usefully be understood as 'reflexive-structural'. The chapter demonstrated that nontheists would often reflexively make appeals to ideas akin to Dandelion's sociological formulations – i.e. the 'absolute perhaps' prescription for continual seeking, and the group's coherent identity primarily being based around orthopraxy. The chapter noted occasions where

nontheists would make direct reference to Dandelion's work in internally claiming that such concepts were the proper basis for a Quaker identity. It was also demonstrated that internal appeals to orthopraxy as the common basis for Quaker identity appeared more broadly throughout the movement, including in sources more closely connected to the group's institutional structures.

The chapter considered whether this indicated that Quakers were now explicitly following Dandelion's delineations in completely marginalising the substantive informative role of discursive theology and/or orthodoxy with regard to the Liberal Quaker identity, in favour of orthopraxy. The chapter argued that Liberal Quakers exhibit a continued propensity to internally reflect upon and engage with questions of their practice, theology and identity in idiosyncratic ways. Therefore, Quaker dynamics were understood as exciting a potential re-opening of the group's discursive landscape, with possible implications for the construction of candidates for neo-orthodoxy. The chapter examined this with reference to internal approaches to Quaker values and, particularly, Quaker testimonies (notably the peace testimony). The chapter also examined academic contentions from Collins and Grant around Liberal Quakers' communally constructing a loose sense of genre or 'grammar' which informs expression of Quaker belief and/or identity. Grant's argument that such underlying rules implied theological claims was considered. It was, however, argued that her suggestions did not relate to substantive or distinctive discursive-theological rationales, which were liable to remain stable when considered in light of the pressures brought forth by the explicit expression of Boulton–Cupitt nontheism. However, the chapter demonstrated that Collins' comparable formulation was illuminating for an understanding

of how Quakers (particularly nontheists) may be strategically positioning themselves and/or negotiating their identity within the group.

Additionally, it demonstrated that, taken holistically, some Quakers (Daniels, 2015; Russ; 2017; Wood, 2016a, 2016b) are internally suggesting solutions to the theism–nontheism divide that mimic the academic formulations which focus on considering narrative and discursive elements, with Collins even stating that his formulations appealed to him both as an anthropologist and as a Quaker (2002b:295). In other words, similar to the phenomena that can be seen with relation to Dandelion's work, some Quakers are reflexively aware of and utilising such potential formulations. These responses typically suggest that Quakers may remain neutral on beliefs around the divine, but that it is useful and necessary for them to maintain communal traditional, historical and/or cultural-linguistic structures for the reflexive purpose of maintaining a distinct and coherent sense of the Liberal Quaker identity. Some of these responses often explicitly draw from the postliberal theology of Lindbeck, who was utilised by Grant (2014) in her academic treatment of the group, highlighting the spiralling nature of the reflexive dynamic within Quakerism. The chapter went on to outline some of the perceivable weakness in these types of response with respect to their likely general attractiveness to Liberal Quakers (some of which were noted by the Quaker commentators themselves: (1) concepts of Quaker tradition themselves are 'elusive' and thin; (2) a number of Quakers are likely to be uncomfortable and/or diverge away from proposed definitive narrative-traditional-cultural structures; and (3) such formulations put little to no emphasis on spirituality and/or experience as a key aspect of Quaker identity and/or belief. Such concerns can be perceived as partially informing the alternative line of alteristic responses that were the major concern of Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 demonstrated the emergence of what the thesis demarcated as alteristic responses. These responses, as indicated, were illuminated in comparison to developments of thought in Bakhtin, Derrida, Levinas and Bauman. Loosely, they were delineated as revolving around an understanding of a religio-ethical experience informed by an openness towards the other, such an understanding having the potential to be directed towards breaking down the distinction between ethics and religiosity, between theism and nontheism. The chapter attempted to give an indication of the way in which these emerging views may look to resolve the divides and tensions within the Liberal Quaker community. However, as mentioned, given the nascent stage of the developments under consideration and the anti-systematic leanings of the modes of thought being compared, the chapter held that the comparative points being made could be understood with reference to a 'family resemblance' model revolving around features such as relationality, other-directedness, hospitality, vulnerability, a radical understanding of nonviolence and an open eschatology.

In demonstrating the emergence of these views, the chapter drew upon previous work done in the field of Quaker Studies on Young Quakers (Best, 2008, 2010), the 'Experiment with Light' group (Meads, 2008, 2011) and Scully's work on Quaker ethics (2008). These gave an indication of the direction of developments in the Quaker movement, which suggest a view of the Quaker identity, religiosity and/or spirituality as constitutively informed by an openness to diversity and/or difference. Comparative developments were also observed in the philosophical and theological work of Rediehs (2015, 2016) and Nakano (2011). Finally, such responses were demonstrated as observable in the work of internal commentators more specifically responding to the challenges of the theism–nontheism issue (Gillman

2018, 2014, 2012; Rock, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c), some with close connections to the group's institutional bodies– i.e. the Revision Preparation Group and BYM (Rowlands, 2017; Russ, 2018).

The chapter ended with a consideration of the potential points of synergy between reflexive-structural and alteristic responses and how they might manifest as neo-orthodoxies and/or new orthodoxy with reference to the forthcoming revision. One particular potential point of synergy suggested was around that of nonviolence, the more discursively orientated reflexive-structural responses often pointing to the commitment as a key aspect of the tradition. Alteristic responses often understand nonviolence with reference to an ethic of non-reciprocal openness towards the other. Subsequently, the thesis suggested that a possible outcome of the theism–nontheism debate may be an increased prominence of a value for nonviolence in Quaker discussions and expressions of the Quaker identity. However, regarding 'new orthodoxy' it is unlikely that any of these formulations will achieve the status of a clear, pervasive or stable authority, even comparable to the previous prominence of typical universalist-type assumptions. However, it does seem likely that they will achieve some representation within the anthological format of the forthcoming *Book of Discipline*, plausibly presented as options for how Quaker diversity may be internally approached.

Overall, the thesis has given a nuanced exploration of how Liberal Quakers, and Liberal Quakerism as a theologically permissive, hyper-liberal and/or liquid religion, are looking to construct candidates for neo-orthodoxy that seek to accommodate the diversity of belief within their group, including elements of nontheism. The thesis has argued that the content

of these constructions can usefully be illuminated via a comparison with developments in the thought of postmodernist thinkers and/or discourse theorists, who attempt to give responses to comparable 'structural' contexts and challenges. In doing so, it suggests that seemingly 'liquid' structures of meaning and/coherence do not necessarily lead to simple dissolution. Rather, the more 'liquid' structures can inform certain phenomenological responses and/or the construction of certain types of religiosity. Considered in relation to Campbell's contention of 'educated classes' engaging in mystical alternative forms of religiosity, the emerging Quakerviews represent new alternative forms of religiosity. This indicates that the character of the religion of the educated classes does not necessarily remain static; rather, they continue to morph and develop. Such developments are worthy of further study: those considered with reference to this Liberal Quaker case may have more general implications for the development of other liberal and pluralistic (religious) groups within a societally secular and radically modern context.

(6.2) Implications

(6.2.1) Contributions to the Field of Knowledge and Relation to Previous Scholarship

Regarding the thesis' original contributions to the field of knowledge, this work is primarily significant in being first thesis-length study to focus on the issue of Liberal Quaker nontheism (that is, outside of the group's internal publications). Given the timing in relation to the forthcoming revision of the *Book of Discipline*, this is also the first study outside of this current process of revision itself – to consider the popular discussions of Liberal

Quakers in relation to the present process of constructing candidate neo-orthodoxy and revision. The study may, therefore, be of some interest to internal Liberal Quakers, potentially becoming entangled the kind of dynamic of reflexivity that informs part of the thesis' examination. However, concerning the external academic study of Quakers (– i.e. the field of Quaker Studies), this thesis can be seen to significantly advance in the incipient academic discussion examining these internal developments that have recently started coming to the fore of Liberal Quakers' own internal deliberations.

The thesis has drawn extensively and built upon work done in the field of Quaker Studies. Given that Dandelion's doctoral work and research was concurrent with the later stages of the Christocentrism-universalism debate and the 1994 revision, to an extent the thesis can be seen as updating that work. It considers the current developments with the Quaker group ahead of the next revision: how Liberal Quakers have moved from internally deliberating over a question of the necessity of Christian beliefs to the Liberal Quaker identity, to questions over the necessity of 'theistic' beliefs. Consequently, the thesis engaged extensively with Dandelion's formulations around the behavioural creed and his later concept of the 'absolute perhaps'.

Whilst noting that these conceptualisations had merit, the thesis did not follow Dandelion's theoretical neo-functionalist approach. Rather, the thesis looked to contribute to the academic discussions by offering a thickened account of how the behavioural creed and the 'absolute perhaps' are manifesting with reference to internal Quaker engagement. In doing so the thesis drew from other scholars in the field of Quaker Studies, such as constructions of Grant and especially Collins, along with bringing in insights from a thorough consideration

of theories of late modernity, many of which have been applied to the Quaker case. However, the thesis made a more extensive original contribution within this thickening in its delineation of reflexive-structural and alteristic responses, the latter of which involved a detailed look into the development and the potential religio-ethical implications of the philosophical thought and accounts of discourse seen in the likes of Bakhtin and Derrida. The brief suggestions of Collins at the end of 'Both Independent and Interconnected Voices: Bakhtin among the Quakers' (2002b) and the theological work of Nakano (2011) notwithstanding, these aspects of philosophical thought have not previously been extensively and comparatively applied to an elucidation of Liberal Quaker development. Indeed, methodologically this aspect of the thesis' approach is relatively novel.

The thesis may also be seen to make an original contribution in that there has been scant academic work considering Quakerism in light of Troelstch's (1992) and Campbell's (1978) concepts around mystic-type religion and 'the secret religion of the educated classes'. Additionally, the thesis may be seen to contribute to considerations around this 'secret religion of the educated classes' developing and changing form. Davies and Northam-Jones did indicate such a line of thought in their treatment of the Sea of Faith Network, saying:

> … groups appearing to offer explicit application of … academic schemes provide an interesting testing ground for the shape of 'the secret religion of the educated classes' in an apparently secularizing society. (2012:228)

Davies' and Northam-Jones' insights around the 'religion of the educated classes' connect with the Boulton–Cupitt line of nontheism and the reflexive-structural responses. Yet the thesis may be seen to add to this work of 'testing … the shape of "the secret religion of the

educated classes"' in its consideration of interrelated, but separate Liberal Quaker sub-groups. Furthermore, the thesis' arguments around the emergence of alteristic responses suggest an alternative way these new forms of religiosity may manifest, thus further contributing to such a line of inquiry.

(6.2.2) Future Research

Concerning directions for future research, one obvious area is to look at how Liberal Quakerism and its internal discussions around nonthesim and (a)theological diversity will continue to develop from this point and how the forthcoming revision of the *Book of Discipline* will take shape. This will allow the arguments and delineations of the thesis to be tested against these ongoing developments. For example, will Liberal Quakers go on to further emphasise orthopraxy, narrative-postliberal-type formulations and/or religio-ethical notions of alterity and other-directedness?

The place of Quaker testimonies and how it might develop, particularly in regard to pacifism and nonviolence, is another potential area for further research. The thesis has noted that both lines of response often claim and/or appeal to the Quaker value for nonviolence. Accordingly, the thesis suggested that a possible outcome of the theism–nontheism debate may be an increased prominence of a value for nonviolence in Quaker discussions and expressions of the Quaker identity. However, this seems at odds with the fact that elsewhere nontheists and those involved in the discussion over theism–nontheism, namely Boulton and Muers, have indicated an acceptance that a minority of Liberal Quakers are not committed pacifists. They even suggested that nontheists may be incorporated along similar

lines to nonpacifists (see §4.3.2). Moreover, Hampton's work on the 2013 British Quaker Survey indicated that those Quakers with less commitment to a belief in God were also less likely to have a strong commitment towards pacifism (2014:29). It should be noted that Boulton's philosophical and/or (a)theological position is different from those of, e.g., Rock or Rediehs. However, it may be that as the discussions around theism–nonthesim continue and Boulton softens his position, he may adopt commensurate positions around Quaker testimonies and pacifism. Generally, it would be valuable to look at how discussions and attitudes to nonviolence and pacifism progress; whether and how the position of nonviolence sees any change or prominence in common framings of the Liberal Quaker identity.

Regarding the development of alteristic responses, it would also be valuable to further explore the degree to which these are distinctively Quaker and informed by traditional Quaker values as opposed to the degree to which they are informed by (and a response to) the current dynamics and context of the Liberal Quaker group (see §§5.1.2.2–5.1.3.1). In line with previous research on 'the ethics of care' (Stack, 1979; Cortese, 1990; Tronto, 1993, cited in: Scully, 2008:119), it is also possible that such alteristic responses are influenced by Quakerism's history as a non-conformist, non-normative, socially marginalised group. Questions over the extent to which modern Liberal Quakers still identify with these characteristics, along with the extent to which such identifications may inform these emerging views, merit further research. Whilst noting these potential factors in the development of these views, the thesis held that the formulations were currently and extensively being positioned as responses to the Liberal Quaker (a)theological diversity and the issue of nontheism. However, Rediehs frames her formulation of a dynamic view of

truth and justice related to a commitment to nonviolence, as a particularly Quaker view with its roots in Quaker history and tradition (2015, 2016). The thesis endeavoured to show that similar responses have been developed amongst postmodernists themselves (notably Derrida and his commentators), which is indicative that such a development of thought was not as uniquely tied to Quaker tradition, as opposed to the issues of postmodernism, as Rediehs indicates. However, again this would seem to be an issue that requires further examination and academic discussion.

Questions over the degree to which this is a distinctive Quaker development or a consequence of the group's current diverse cultural context, may be illuminated through an examination into other potentially similarly diverse, hyper-liberal and/or liquid religions (e.g. the Unitarians). Secular political groups looking to accommodate and respect diversity whilst still motivating a communal political organisation and activism (e.g. Anarchist and LGBTQ+ groups) may also provide interesting testing grounds for such developments, particularly around notions of alteristic ethical experience. This is a line of thought previously suggested and pursued by Critchley (2014b). Further research into these groups would also serve to test the utility of this thesis' delineations and arguments in more general contexts.

(6.3) Concluding Points

The major point of the thesis is that Liberal Quaker responses to nontheism and their broader diversity may be understood as broadly following two streams: reflexive-structural responses and alteristic responses. The thesis argued that these could be illuminated via a

consideration of theories of 'late modernity' and comparisons with developments in the projects of 'postmodernist' thinkers – i.e. thinkers contemplating and responding to similar dynamics and challenges. Whilst, the thesis does not view it as likely that any particular line of response will gain pre-eminence as Liberal Quaker 'orthodoxy', it does argue that these responses are likely to gain some representation in the revised *Book of Discipline*. Moreover, they may have impact on the expression of Quaker identity in the group's internal popular literary outputs and discussions – e.g. re-motivating considerations and emphases on the commitment to non-violence. Their development also bears implications for the morphing shape of the 'religion of the educated classes' and the future development of reflective religious groups within a broadly secular and/or radically modern societal context.

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